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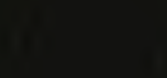
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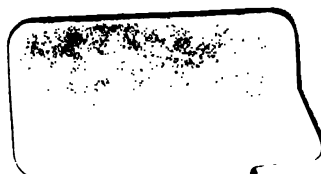
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THE  
BARON OF EPPENFELD;  
OR,  
THE POOR CLARE.

*A Mediæval Romance.*

BY  
JOHN J. HAYDEN.

" 'Tis thus with our life while it passes along,  
Like a vessel at sea amidst sunshine and song :  
Gaily we glide in the gaze of the world,  
With streamers afloat and with canvas unfurl'd;  
All gladness and glory to wandering eyes,  
Yet chartered by sorrow and freighted with sighs.  
Fading and false is the aspect it wears,  
Like the smiles we put on just to cover our tears :  
And the withering thoughts which the world cannot know,  
Like heart-broken exiles lie burning below ;  
Whilst the vessel drives on to that desolate shore,  
Where the dreams of our childhood are vanished and o'er."  
T. K. HERVEY.



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10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.  
1878.

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“ Assuming now a conjuror’s office, I  
Thus on your future fortune prophesy :  
Soon as your novelty is o’er,  
And you are young and new no more,  
In some dark dirty corner thrown,  
Mouldy with damps, with cobwebs strown,  
Your leaves shall be the book-worm’s prey,  
Or sent to chandler-shop away,  
And doom’d to suffer public scandal,  
Shall line the trunk or wrap the candle.

\* \* \* \* \*

Again should it be asked your page,  
‘Pray what may be the author’s age ?  
Your faults no doubt will make it clear,  
I scarce have seen my twentieth year.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now then your venturous course pursue :  
Go, my delight ! Dear book, adieu !”

M. G. LEWIS : *Preface to “ The Monk.”*





# THE BARON OF EPPENFELD.



## CHAPTER I.


'TWAS a wild night ; the rain came down in torrents ; the wind howled through the tall, gaunt, spectral trees that, naked and leafless, overhung the lonely road. Now a lull would occur, and now the demon of the storm seemed to rage with redoubled fury. The tall oaks bent and swayed like reeds beneath the furious blast, the thunder rolled overhead, and the vivid flashes of lightning lit up with a ghastly brilliancy the scene of havoc and desolation extending round on every side. During one of these pauses, when the tempest momen-

tarily relaxed its fury, as though collecting its energies for a fresh and stupendous effort, a traveller, closely muffled in a long riding-cloak, turned an angle of the road. His steed seemed weary and exhausted, for the foam stood in heavy flakes on his glossy coat, and the blood trickled down his flanks where his rider had applied the spur in the apparently vain hope of urging him to further efforts of speed and endurance. The horseman pulled up for an instant, and peered anxiously forward into the darkness, as though seeking some human habitation, however humble, where he might obtain a night's lodging for himself and his jaded steed. He was wholly unable to discern any place of the kind, and he prepared to quit the spot. At that instant a more than usually vivid flash showed him the ruins of what appeared to be an ancient feudal castle, huge and of great extent, standing on a considerable eminence, about

a quarter of a mile from the road. In spite of his anxiety, there was something in its general appearance that so irresistibly attracted his attention, that hastily pulling up, so as almost to throw back his horse on its haunches, he remained with eyes fixed on the shadowy outline of the ancient keep.

A second flash gave him a still clearer view of this huge structure, which, like some tutelary genius of other days, overlooked the surrounding country, claiming respect as a mighty monument of men and times long since passed away, with their hopes and fears, their interests, their customs, their laws, and buried for ever in the yawning bottomless gulf of time. At length, unable longer to restrain his curiosity, he sprang to the ground, and wading through the mud, securely fastened his horse by the bridle to the trunk of a large tree, and crossing the hedge, advanced over the fields towards the castle. This he

was unable to approach without considerable difficulty, as the ground was rendered moist and yielding by the rain ; and encumbered as he was by his riding-boots, he often sank to his knees in the clayey soil. But at length his perseverance was rewarded, for he found himself at the foot of the steep hill on which stood the castle. From this spot he was enabled to pursue his course without much difficulty, for the earth, unlike that of the level fields, was hard, firm, and but little affected by the water. When about half way up the ascent, he easily, in spite of the blinding rain, discerned clearly and distinctly the dark outline of the ruin. He posted himself beneath the spreading branches of a venerable oak, which, by sheltering him from the rage of the tempest, permitted him to bestow his undivided attention on the object before him. There it stood ; its massive walls, memorials of its former strength, were rent and torn by



slow decay, and by exposure to the storms and vicissitudes of successive centuries ; its wide and yawning moat was choked with foul noxious weeds, beneath whose shade lurked the noisome toad and the deadly adder ; its wide and noble gateway whence in days gone by had ridden forth successive nobles, in all the pomp of feudal power, with troops of vassals and steel-clad men-at-arms, with the fluttering of pennons, the clash of weapons, the neighing of horses, and the loud fanfares of trumpets which had welcomed its lords returning from battle or from the chase, loaded with the spoils of hostile chieftains, or with the sylvan trophies of the lonely greenwood ; which had seen many a youthful bride pass beneath its frowning arch with her relations and splendid suite ; which had seen crowds of knights and barons press the pavement beneath on the occasion of some high festival, and which,

surviving all these, still remained dark, lonely, and sad, as though opposing a sullen resistance to gradual decay, and frowning defiance on the all-devastating power of time. The stranger marked with curiosity the old church steeple, which rose within the enclosure ; and high o'ertopping all the rest, he saw the lofty donjon tower, with its cracked walls and its ruined battlements, whence long tufts of grass, starting from the numerous fissures and crevices, were waving in the wind like the plumes of a hearse. Even while he gazed the thunder rolled overhead, the lightning flashed vividly and struck the venerable tower. The ancient fabric tottered to its base, it crumbled away, there was a mighty crash, and it fell forward amongst the ruins, scattering destruction on every side.

The watcher, overawed by this catastrophe, remained gazing in silence. Thoughts of what that castle on which he now looked

with such oppression of heart had been centuries before he stood there—of the scenes of war, of festivity which had been there enacted, rushed upon his mind, and he remained buried in silent reflection on the mutability, the unstable nature of all earthly things, and pre-eminently of man himself. Where were the gallant knights and fair dames that once thronged those princely chambers? Gone, gone for ever. Where were the lights, the splendid furniture, the costly tapestry? where all the pomp of wealth, all the insignia of pride and power? All gone, all passed away like a dream that leaves no trace behind. The last remaining memorial, the ancient fortress, stood before him, stripped of every attribute of life, the skeleton of its former self, lonely, desolate, silent as the grave.

When he recovered from this train of melancholy musing, he began to be apprehensive of a fate similar to that of the old



tower overtaking the ancient tree which sheltered him, and which indeed seemed coeval with the feudal castle. He accordingly cast a last look at the old building, taking in at a single glance all its details, its towers, its walls, its church, and then turning his back he made the best of his way to the road, and, remounting, continued his journey.

By this time the fury of the tempest had somewhat abated ; his steed, refreshed and invigorated, plunged forward rapidly, so that in a short time he rode into the little village of —, and pulled up before the door of the principal inn. He was welcomed by the host, a stout, phlegmatic German, and having given orders for supper, and a bed for the night, he took occasion to mention the castle which had so occupied his attention.

The host regarded him with attention for some moments ; then, slowly withdraw-

ing his pipe from his mouth, he replied with solemn emphasis, as he emitted a huge puff of smoke : " That is the Castle of Eppenfeld."

Now this did not explain much to the stranger, and he accordingly took occasion to make further inquiries concerning the place, at the same time mentioning the fall of the donjon tower, of which he had been a witness.

On hearing this the host, devoutly turning up his eyes to heaven, said that he wished that the rest of the building had gone after it ; " for," added he, " the storm would then do some good besides spoiling poor men's crops, and flooding the houses."

" How !" cried his interrogator, who was somewhat of an antiquarian, and regarded the innkeeper's exclamation as something very little short of sacrilegious ; " do you desire the destruction of this venerable ruin ? What can be the cause of such an

unprecedented wish, worthy only of a savage? What is there in this castle to distinguish it from any other old feudal pile?"

This led to explanations, which so excited our traveller's curiosity that he prevailed on the old man to relate as much as he knew about the place.

Accordingly, when the table was cleared after supper, glasses well supplied with something stronger than water were brought in, pipes were filled, and the host, his guest, and two or three old village acquaintances, who had dropped in during the course of the evening, drew their chairs round a comfortable fire, which appeared all the warmer from the wind that whistled without, rattling against the panes, but striving in vain to effect an entrance into the comfortable parlour of the cosy little tavern.

After sundry hems, ostensibly to clear

his throat, but in reality to impress his auditors with a proper idea of the solemnity and importance of his narrative, mine host slowly took from his pocket an old book, which he declared he had accidentally found some years before lying in a corner of the house, and which contained a true and circumstantial account of the tragical events which had conferred such an ill-omened celebrity on the house of Eppenfeld. Having carefully adjusted his glasses he took up the book, and amidst profound silence, he read the following narrative.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SORCERESS.

"Come, cross my hand ! my art surpasses  
All that did ever mortal know :  
Come, maidens, come ! my magic glasses  
Your future husband's form can show.

"For 'tis to me the power is given,  
Unclosed the book of fate to see ;  
To read the fixed resolves of heaven,  
And dive into futurity.

"I guide the pale moon's silver wagon ;  
The winds in magic bonds I hold ;  
I charm to sleep the crimson dragon,  
Who loves to watch o'er buried gold.

"Fenced round with spells unhurt I venture,  
Their Sabbath strange where witches keep ;  
Fearless the sorcerer's circle enter,  
And woundless tread on snakes asleep.

"Then silent hear while I discover  
What I in fortune's mirror view ;  
And each when many a year is over,  
Shall own the gipsy's saying true."

"MONK" LEWIS.

It was the last day of July, 15—. Great was the rejoicing in the Castle, for on this day Philibert, Baron of Eppenfeld, celebrated his accession to the estates and titles of his forefathers. The great hall was filled with guests. The floor was strewn with fresh rushes, the princely apartment, rudely yet not ungracefully carved in black oak, was ornamented by trophies of weapons placed at intervals round the walls, while above these hung the banners of the successive chiefs of the family, richly worked and emblazoned with the devices and quarterings of the ancient house of the Eppenfelds. Several long tables were ranged down the hall, and round these sat the household of the baron, consisting of his men-at-arms—in their undress uniform of a tight leather jerkin and hose, still bearing the marks of their armour—the archers, and several hired soldiers, besides a large number of ser-

vants. On a raised dais at the farther end was placed another and smaller table, occupied by the Baron and his principal guests. In the centre, seated in a huge arm-chair, lined with crimson velvet, with the legs and arms quaintly carved to represent lions' claws, sat Philibert himself.

This young man was the nephew of the late Baron Frederic, being the son of his only brother, Sir Manfred. His father dying during the infancy of Philibert, the boy was taken under the care of his uncle, who, being unmarried, destined him for his heir. In order that in more mature years the illustrious race to which he belonged might find in him a representative worthy to bear its honours, the old noble spared no pains in his education, but early placed him under the tuition of Father Bernard, a venerable Franciscan, who laboured, not without success, to make him acquainted

with the principal part of what he himself knew, whilst Baron Frederic overlooked his training in those martial exercises then considered of such great importance, and in which he made such progress as to astonish his preceptor. Thus at the age of two-and-twenty, Philibert had so advanced in his studies, and in the military education, as to be considered an extremely accomplished young man. Unfortunately for himself, the system adopted by his uncle was not without faults, and these too of a very serious nature. Delighted with the quick comprehension and the indubitable manifestations of talent for which from his earliest years his nephew had been remarkable, the Baron set no bounds to the natural kindness of his nature. He indulged the boy in every possible way. The result of this treatment was not long in making its appearance. Philibert grew up warm-



hearted, and generous indeed, but at the same time haughty, proud, and expecting deference and respect from all with whom he came in contact. To his uncle, indeed, from a sentiment of gratitude, he was always submissive and implicitly obedient ; this was, on the whole, unfortunate, since it prevented the Baron from seeing and correcting in his nephew those faults which were perfectly plain to every one else, but of which no one cared to inform him. Such was the character of Philibert, when, by the death of his relative, he found himself sole lord of the domain of Eppenfeld. In person he was extremely handsome. His light flaxen hair, his eyes full of animation, and his attractive appearance seldom failed to prepossess in his favour those with whom he was brought in contact. On the present occasion he was richly clad in black velvet, and wore a magnificent crimson robe, lined with silk

and edged with ermine, fastened in front by a jewelled clasp.

The other guests were all attired with similar elegance. The servants made their appearance with gilt dishes, bearing the substantial fare in which our ancestors delighted—the roast capons, the baked swans, and many others of a similar description. At length the peacock was introduced on a silver dish, preceded by music, and was ceremoniously carved by the chief cook, who was clad in velvet and wore a gold chain round his neck, as a mark of distinction. The choicest wines of France, Hungary, and the Rhine flowed round without stint. The vassals and retainers made merry with equally substantial, if less dainty, fare; the ale and mead circulated amongst them with an almost alarming rapidity, and the old hall, which had not witnessed such a scene for many a long year, rang to its very rafters with the

shouts and laughter of the assembled company.

The meats were now cleared away, and the pastry and fruits of various kinds made their appearance. It was on the preparation of this course that the cook chiefly prided himself, and indeed as it seemed not without reason. Lions, palaces, and numberless other constructions of pastry, mountains of the most luscious fruits covered the board, and were duly honoured by the guests.

At this moment the door of the hall opened, and a woman of strange appearance entered, followed by an attendant, who, approaching the Baron, told him in an undertone that she insisted on seeing him, in spite of all opposition and representation that he could not receive her at present.

The woman stood alone in the middle of the hall, where she excited universal attention. She was tall and gaunt, whilst

her dark-brown complexion, almost black from exposure to the sun, either proved her to be a native of the East, or that she had spent the greater portion of her life in some tropical climate. Her long robes swept the ground behind her, and on her head she wore a crimson shawl, arranged in the form of a turban.

After a few moments' consideration the Baron called her to him, and after demanding of her her business, and receiving no answer, he inquired whether she was weak or ill, and if she would take some refreshment. Some food was set before her, of which she partook.

Meanwhile speculation was busy amongst the guests as to who this stranger could be. It transpired that she was a Syrian fortune-teller. The Baron Falkenstein joyously proposed that they should have their fortunes told, and that as Philibert was the master of the house they should begin with

him. To this the Baron laughingly assented, and the woman, who gave her name as Zara, was called up for the purpose.

On hearing the Baron's request she was silent a moment, and then replied in an impressive tone :

"I am prepared to obey."

"Then," said the Baron, after an instant's reflection, "tell me what will be the issue of the journey I am about to undertake?"

She motioned for him to extend his hand, at which she gazed long and earnestly, whilst she sang the following words to a wild Oriental air :

SONG.

"I view the oak, 'tis like the rock,  
Its roots are firm and deep ;  
I hear the raging tempest's shock  
Above its branches sweep.

"I see the lordly forest king  
Like sapling bend and sway,  
The mighty trunk doth shake and swing,  
The limbs are rent away.

Its frame is seared by lightning's flash,  
    'Tis torn from out the ground ;  
And now I hear a fearful crash;  
    Its ruins lie around.

“Halia's land is bright and fair,  
    And smiling to the view,  
But mighty lord beware, beware,  
    She smileth not for you.

“Beware, beware, my art foretells  
    A danger tracks thy path ;  
Be warned by never-failing spella,  
    Or fear th' o'erhanging wrath.

“Be warned, the fatal wish resign,  
    'Ere fate's decree hath pass'd,  
And ere destruction o'er thy line  
    Comes like the rushing blast.”

As the woman ceased a thrill of horror passed through the assembly, and was immediately succeeded by a dead unbroken silence. On Philibert especially her words seemed to produce an extraordinary effect. His face became of an ashy pallor, the colour fled from his lips, and with a stifled groan he sank back in his chair.

He had not as yet informed any one of his intention to visit Italy, and his con-

sternation at finding the circumstance known to this stranger may, when we take into consideration the superstition and credulity so universally prevalent at that time, be more easily imagined than described. Conscious, however, that he must by one means or other regain his credit in the minds of his guests, and hide as far as possible from his servants and retainers the terror which still oppressed him, he assumed a forced smile, and exclaimed aloud, "The poor creature is demented ; we must not allow her ravings to interfere with our mirth ; fill out the wine !"

The Syrian had turned to depart, but on hearing the baron she stopped, and looking him full in the face, replied :

" Baron of Eppenfeld, you scorn my warning and you deride my words ; but beware ! My art is unerring, and it tells me that if you visit Italy, you are lost both in this world and in the next. See that shield," she

continued, extending her arm, and pointing to a large shield on which were engraved the arms of the house of Eppenfeld, and which was hung on the wall directly behind the Baron's seat ; " when, untouched by mortal hands it is unfastened from its place and falls to the ground, know it as a sign that my prophecy is about to be fulfilled."

So saying, she walked slowly out of the hall, crossed the drawbridge, and avoiding the village, where festivities were at their height in honour of the occasion, she struck out into the open country, and ere morning broke was far out of sight of the frowning keep and lowering walls of the Castle of Eppenfeld.

For a short time after her departure a feeling of gloom and despondency pervaded the company, but under the influence of the light, the wine, and the friendly faces around, this soon wore off, and the banquet proceeded with even greater spirit from the



zest created by the momentary interruption which we have just recounted. Soon after midnight the company separated: the nobles mounted their steeds, and followed by their attendants left the Castle; the retainers sought their couches, and darkness and profound stillness reigned where but a few minutes before was the scene of festivity and riotous mirth.

Philibert alone remained in the hall. He looked involuntarily at the huge silver shield which hung on the wall and glittered in the pale moonlight. The prophecy returned to his mind for an instant, and he thought of having it removed; but, reflecting that this would seem pusillanimous, he resolved to allow it to remain. As he gazed out of the large window of the hall his thoughts took a more cheerful turn. As his eyes wandered over the village he beheld the huge bonfires blazing in his honour, and the dark figures of the

peasants as they moved to and fro. All was so bright and promising that he could look with pity on what he considered the ravings of a disordered brain, and sought his couch full of hope and pleasure, where he soon fell into a deep slumber, and revelled amidst imaginary delights no less enchanting than his waking thoughts.

## CHAPTER III.

Two or three days after the occurrences just related, a cavalcade was to be seen descending the hill on which stood the Castle of Eppenfeld. It consisted of eight persons. At its head rode Philibert, on a splendid coal-black charger. The Baron was plainly attired ; he wore his cuirass ; a pair of heavy riding-boots, and a small plumed cap completed his costume. Behind him came his squire, bearing his helmet, and another attendant carrying his pennon. The remainder of the troop consisted of five armed retainers. Soon the party reached the bottom of the hill, and proceeded through the wide baronial domain till they reached the high-road, which they

followed in the direction of Tübingen. This town they reached in the course of two days. They again pressed along through the fertile plains of Germany, and on the eighth day after their departure from Eppenfelf, they crossed the Swiss frontier. Here the character of the country changed. The long succession of fields gleaming with ripened corn, the undulating plains, the meadows, the orchards, and all the features of rural beauty disappeared : here were seen the huge mountain, its sides clothed with a scanty vegetation scarcely sufficient to support the wandering flocks of goats, its summit white with perpetual snow gleaming brightly in the rays of the sun ; the overhanging precipice, the deep and lonely pass, the fathomless tarn, and the wild stunted ash, waving mournfully on the edge of some inaccessible crag. The lammergeir soared high overhead amidst the clouds, the untamable chamois

was to be discerned bounding from cliff to cliff with unerring foot, and the fresh, sharp breeze of morning bore with it the report of the hunter's gun as he pursued his flying prey. These scenes, so different to what he had been accustomed to behold, made a deep impression on Philibert. He would often order his attendants to remain behind, and would ride on alone for hours, while he contemplated with mingled awe and pleasure the stupendous marvels of Nature; at other times he would wander out alone in the early morning, and seating himself on a lonely rock would await the rising sun. Amongst his other accomplishments the Baron possessed some taste for versification, and during a solitary walk on one of these occasions, he composed the following lines :

'Tis early morn, the cooling breeze,  
That faintly stirs the airy bound,  
And rustles 'midst th' umbrageous trees,  
But serves to mark the stillness round.

Above gigantic mountains tow'r,  
Their summits wrapt in changeless snow,  
While noisy torrents downward pour,  
And seek the silent vales below.

O'er all a heavy vapour lies,  
A sombre pall of shifting clouds,  
That hides from sight the azure skies,  
And all the matchless landscape shrouds.

But see, the early flush of day  
On yonder cliff-top sparkles bright,  
Behold, the rich resplendent ray  
Has gilded yonder crag with light !

The snow-flakes, 'neath the ardent beam,  
Like di'mond clusters flash and shine ;  
And see, yon brawling mountain stream  
Appears a moving silver line.

Behold, o'er yonder mountain crest  
The golden sun his throne uprears,  
And by his glance of fire opprest,  
Each hostile vapour disappears.

The drops of sparkling early dew,  
That gleam on every bending spray,  
Assume a hundred colours new,  
With ev'ry rich and glowing ray.

From cottage nestling 'midst the trees,  
Ascend the curling wreaths of smoke,  
And borne along upon the breeze,  
Is heard the woodman's ringing stroke.

The frightened chamois, sure and fleet,  
     From cliff to cliff like lightning bounds ;  
 The hunter tracks his flying feet,  
     His shout 'midst hollow crags resounds.

The screaming vulture upward soars,  
     The merry huntsman winds his horn,  
 The torrent down the steep crag pours,  
     And all proclaims the reign of morn.

On another occasion, whilst watching  
 the flight of an eagle soaring high above  
 the loftiest peaks of the Alps, he composed  
 a short ode, which he subsequently corrected,  
 and which ran thus :

THE EAGLE.

All hail thou lordly mountain king !  
     Hail monarch of the cloud !  
 Upon thy sweeping outstretched wing  
     Thou soarest skyward proud.

For when the earliest sun-beam glows,  
     And tears the pall of night,  
 The faint, fresh breeze of morn that blows  
     Gives signal for thy flight.

Far, far above the mountain steep,  
     Above thy native crags,  
 Thy mighty pinions onward sweep,  
     With power that never flags.

Above the narrow mountain pass  
Where blows the wintry breeze,  
Above the noxious black morass,  
Above the mountain trees ;

Above the silent tarn, the lake  
Where sullen shadows fall,  
Above the hill whence torrents break  
And rushing streamlets brawl ;

Above the summit crown'd with snow,  
All still and sad and lone,  
Above the rock where th' ash trees grow,  
And 'midst the breezes moan ;

Above the noisy mountain side,  
Where range the shepherd's flock,  
And where his cot, but just descried,  
Stands 'neath some frowning rock ;

Above the waving fields of corn  
That gleam and glisten bright,  
Away, away, thy course is borne,  
Towards the realms of light.

Vast cities lie beneath thine eye,  
Like specks upon the plain,  
And scarce e'en thou below can'st spy  
The wide and foaming main.

Beneath thee, tipt and touch'd with light,  
The moving vapour gleams ;  
A radiant light, all sparkling white,  
Comes down in silver streams.



Above, the dazzling lord of day  
Looks from his golden seat,  
All nature seems to chant a lay  
His welcome glance to greet.

And thus along through purest air,  
Whilst all is still around,  
For through the scenes, in motion e'er  
Is heard no faintest sound,

Thou slowly, stately, sails't along,  
Like vessel o'er the sea,  
No sounds of nature round thee throng,  
All's dead, "save only thee."

Thou wing'st thy golden path on high,  
Thy glance upon the sun,  
And rev'lest 'neath the azure sky,  
Till day her course hath run.

And when encrimsoned, tipt with gold,  
The mighty orb of day,  
Sinks down 'midst fleecy vapour roll'd,  
And slowly dies away,

Thou seek'st the mountain summit lone,  
Thy lofty crag-built nest,  
Until the sun remount his throne,  
And calls thee from thy rest.

Alas ! blest bird, how bright thy life,  
What happy hours are thine,  
Far, far from all discordant strife,  
I would thy days were mine.

After several days' journey the travellers reached the monastery of St. Bernard, where they were hospitably entertained by the good monks. Having recruited their strength by a short stay, they once more recommenced their journey. The weather was propitious, and as they made rapid progress the evening of the fifth day saw them descending into the plains of Italy. They put up for the night at a small cottage, situated on a rising knoll, and commanding a view of an extensive range of country. Having partaken of a simple meal, consisting principally of coarse bread, goats' milk, and fruits, the squire and the men-at-arms, worn out by the journey, retired early to rest ; but Philibert could not resist the temptation of viewing by moonlight the scene which on his arrival had so greatly excited his admiration. The moon had already risen, and hung like a silver shield in the clear azure of the sky.

Now her beams were for a moment obscured by a passing cloud, but almost instantaneously they burst forth again with new splendour. The calm zephyr, scarcely stirring the foliage of the lofty trees, came across the plains scented with the perfumes of a thousand flowers, of size, odour, and beauty unknown in more northern climates. The moonbeams were reflected on the placid bosom of a large lake which appeared at some little distance, and whose waves, as if tinged with fire, seemed of molten gold.

Along the road were to be seen troops of peasants returning from the light labour of the day. Their carts were loaded with corn and fruits, and their merry songs, mingled with the tinkling of the bells fastened to the collars of the oxen, and subdued by distance, came soft and sweet on the wings of the breeze.

Long did the Baron contemplate this

enchanting scene, so truly Italian in every detail. At length he rose, and entering the cottage, took from the wall a gittern, and again seating himself outside, he ran his fingers over the chords, and extemporised the following song :

ITALY.

“ Italia ! oh ! Italia bright,  
How wondrous fair thou art,  
The cradle thou of freedom’s light,  
The garden thou of art.

“ Oh ! worthy thou to reign as queen,  
O’er all the human race,  
For never land so fair was seen,  
So blest with ev’ry grace.

“ Oh ! worthy thou to be the home  
Of Europe’s greatest sons ;  
And worthy, thou gav’st birth to Rome,  
Whose name in story runs.

“ Oh ! glorious are thy sunny skies,  
Like sapphire deeply blue,  
Where angry tempests never rise,  
Nor clouds of sable hue.

“ Thy campaigns soft, and fair, and green,  
Like gardens deck’d with flow’rs,  
A refuge e’er from sunbeams keen,  
Thy sweetly shaded bow’rs.

"Thy lakes that still unruffled lie,  
By storm or angry blast,  
In crystal depths reflect the sky,  
The white clouds gliding past.

"The fisher moves his tiny craft  
Across the broad expanse,  
The softly murm'ring breezes waft,  
The rippling wavelets dance.

"The merry song awakes the sounds,  
And echoes round the shore,  
With laughter gay the crag resounds,  
While dips the plashing oar.

"But oh ! when night her silent reign  
O'er all in splendour holds,  
Oh ! then o'er rock, and stream, and plain,  
A gorgeous scene unfolds.

"Oh ! then each feature rich and rare  
Seems touch'd with magic rays ;  
And all a thousand graces wear,  
In all fresh beauties blaze.

"And silv'ry Luna's placid beams  
Seem gilding ev'ry part,  
Each feature fresh in beauty gleams  
With charms unknown to art.

"The silent dell, the fairy glade,  
Where gently sighs the breeze,  
T'harmonious blended light and shade,  
The stately waving trees.

"The heav'ns, where ev'ry gleaming star,  
Is sparkling gem-like bright,  
While seated in her pearly car,  
The moon rides queen of night."

They travelled the whole of the following day, but in the evening of the second they entered the then small town of Monza, where they put up at the principal hostelry. Here the Baron was agreeably surprised by meeting his old friend, the Count of Riesenburgh, then on his way to Rome. Before retiring to rest it was settled that they should travel together;—by what means their intention was frustrated will shortly be related.

## CHAPTER IV.

CLARE SFORZA.

"Pensive Nun devout and pure,  
Sober, steadfast and demure,  
All in robe of darkest grain,  
Flowing with majestic train,  
And sable stole of Cyprus lawn  
Over thy decent shoulders drawn."

MILTON, *Il Penseroso*.

SONG.

"Life's a varied, bright illusion,  
Joy and sorrow, light and shade ;  
Turn from sorrow's dark suffusion,  
Catch the pleasures ere they fade.

"Fancy paints with hue unreal  
Smile of bliss, and sorrow's mood ;  
If they both are but ideal,  
Why reject the seeming good ?

"Hence ! no more ! 'tis wisdom calls ye,  
Bids ye court times' present aid ;  
The future trust not—hope enthral's ye,  
Catch the pleasures ere they fade."

MRS. ANN RADCLIFFE.

EARLY on the following morning Philibert left his couch, and went forth to enjoy a ride before breakfast. He was absent for about an hour. His first impressions of Italy were more than confirmed by everything he saw around him, and he found it difficult to decide whether she shone more beautiful beneath the soft moonlight, or under the glorious blaze of sunset in the pure sapphire of a cloudless southern sky.

On his return the Baron breakfasted, and again went forth into the streets. His attention was particularly attracted by several groups of people moving in one direction, and talking together with great volubility. He took the same route, and in a few moments found himself standing before the porch of a plain yet tastefully constructed church.

The sounds of the organ pealing from within caught his ear, and from the crowds



blocking the entrance he perceived that some solemnity of unusual importance must be proceeding within the sacred walls.

As he was dressed with studied plainness, he did not fear his rank becoming known, and he accordingly demanded of a bystander what it was that occasioned all this bustle and excitement.


The Italian regarded him with wonder, not unmixed with curiosity, till, perceiving from his garments and his foreign accent that he was a stranger, he replied that Clare, the only daughter of the Marquis Sforza, and niece of the Duke of Milan, was about to make her entrance as a novice into the order of the Poor Clares.

Surprised at this action on the part of a lady of such a wealthy and powerful family, and with such brilliant prospects, Philibert inquired the reason of this strange resolution. But his informant was unable to satisfy him on this point, which had indeed

puzzled the brains of the whole Duchy of Milan for some time before, and the baron, having nothing more to learn at present, pressed forward through the crowd, entered the church doors, and by dint of perseverance and considerable exertion, he secured for himself a favourable position within a few yards of the altar-rails, from whence he was in a position to see the whole ceremonial.

The altar was ablaze with candles; beneath the light flashed cups of gold enriched with gems, and above stood a painting of priceless worth. At a screen to one side of the altar could be discerned the white head-dresses and pale faces of the nuns. The smoke of the censers ascended in heavy clouds, its perfume mingling with the scent of rare flowers placed upon the altar, while, to complete the solemnity of the scene, the pure mellow tones of the organ swelled through the church, causing

every pillar to vibrate with its deep and hollow notes. Beneath a splendid throne at one side of the altar sat the Cardinal —, Archbishop of Milan, his crozier, glittering with brilliants, in his hand, and wearing on his head a mitre worth a city's ransom. Around him stood several ecclesiastics of high dignity, some plainly attired in cassocks, others habited in gorgeous vestments. Near these stood an old man of venerable aspect. His figure, but slightly bent by the weight of years, was tall and striking, his dark eye shone with all the fire of youth, and his grey locks, parted in the middle of the forehead, fell down on his shoulders. He was plainly though richly attired in black velvet and silver. By his side stood a tall handsome cavalier, who seemed not less interested than himself in the present ceremony. The former of these was Raymond, Marquis Sforza, and the second his son, Casimir, Count of



Manfredonia, the elder brother of the beautiful Clare.

On her next the eye of Philibert rested, while mingled sensations of wonder, admiration, and sorrow that a creature so lovely should be destined to the cold and comfortless cloister, agitated his breast.

She was richly attired in blue velvet, her long black hair flowed down over her shoulders and splendid pearl bracelets encircled her wrists. Her face was pale, and her large lustrous eyes were inflamed with marks of tears.

The ceremony proceeded. She was interrogated as to whether she was content to join the severe order of the Poor Clares as a novice. She replied in the affirmative, and then, one by one, she took the gorgeous jewels and ornaments, and flinging them from her, declared her renunciation of the world, and her intention to devote herself to the service of God in the cloister.

As she pronounced these words she turned to leave the church. Her eye at that moment met the piercing glance of Philibert fixed upon her, and blushing deeply, she hurried from the altar.

It was the work of a moment; yet in that time, in that single gaze, the history of a lifetime seemed centred, and at that moment these kindred souls felt an emotion such as one experiences when, for the first time, one meets a long-absent but unforgotten friend. After the lapse of fifteen minutes, Clare returned to the church, habited in the garb of a novice. The remainder of the solemnity was proceeded with; but the Baron saw not the lights, nor heard the voices of the choir, for his whole soul was centred on one angelic countenance—the countenance of the youthful novice.

The music ceased, the archbishop and the other celebrants departed, Clare left

the church, and all was still and silent, but still the Baron knelt, absorbed in mental contemplation of the beautiful vision that had passed before his eyes. At length he rose, started at finding himself alone, and casting one longing glance at the spot where he had last seen her, he bent his knee before the altar and left the chapel.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LOVERS' FLIGHT.

"False Love, how simple souls thou cheatest !  
     In myrtle bower that traitor near,  
 Long watch'd an hour—the softest, sweetest—  
     The evening hour to shepherds dear.

"In tones so bland he praised her beauty ;  
     Such melting airs his pipe could play,  
 The thoughtless hour forgot her duty,  
     And fled in Love's embrace away."

                    "MONK" LEWIS.

DURING the whole of that night but one object occupied the mind of the Baron : his dreams and his waking thoughts presented to him the same image—in different positions and under different circumstances, it is true, but still the same—the form of the beautiful novice of St. Clare. Whilst he slept, he retraced the whole of

the scene which had so impressed him in the morning. Again he saw himself standing in the little conventual church, again he heard the organ's peal; and the stately figures of the officiating priests, the majestic form of the Cardinal Archbishop, of the handsome Count of Manfredonia, the aged countenance of the Marquis, flitted before his mental gaze, but the central figure, on which all his soul seemed absorbed, was that of the youthful nun, as, in all her beauty, rendered still more striking by a simple monastic dress, she stood before the altar. Again he imagined himself in a church; the confused chant of voices floated in his ear, and a priest, advancing towards him, asked him in a solemn tone whether he would take Clare, Countess Sforza, as his wedded wife.

He was about to reply in the affirmative, when behind the priest appeared the pale and haggard countenance of the Marquis—



his beard long and untrimmed, and his snowy locks flowing dishevelled down his shoulders. He raised his finger menacingly, as though to forbid the words ; but the Baron mustered his courage and replied audibly, "I will."

At once the whole scene disappeared, and he found himself standing on the brink of a lonely lake, in the midst of a forest. Suddenly the waters were agitated, and the form of a woman rose from them. Her long tresses were entangled with weeds, and her white robe covered with mud and slime. She pointed to a gaping wound in the throat, whence the blood trickled in a ruddy stream ; then, looking heavenwards, uttered the single word, "Justice," and sank below the surface.

Philibert felt himself tremble violently ; the sweat poured down his face, and with a groan of horror he awoke.

Morning dispelled the gloomy visions of

night, and rising early the Baron sought the chamber of Count Riesenburgh. He was aware that his friend was on intimate terms with the Marquis Sforza, and he resolved to ask for an introduction. In this he had not then any fixed intention, but rather a faint hope that it might possibly lead to a better acquaintance with the fair votaress.

The Count readily consented to Philibert's request, and about midday they mounted their horses, and followed by a single attendant, bent their course towards Milan, in which direction rose the Castle of Sforza, situated about three miles from the archiepiscopal city. Entering a splendid gateway, they advanced towards the castle, an edifice of considerable extent, standing on a rising knoll.

They were admitted into a large vaulted chamber, where, in the course of a few minutes, they were joined by the Marquis.

The old man was courteous and engaging ;

and at length Philibert managed to introduce the subject of Clare's reception, at which he had been present. Immediately the Marquis's face became overcast, and he heaved a deep sigh.

The Baron, all impatience to hear the reasons which had induced the noble damsel to enter a monastic order, was yet prevented by the code of politeness from making the inquiry. The Marquis, however, soon gratified his curiosity in this respect, as the subject was one to which indeed the old man's mind seemed to gravitate as the needle towards the north, and of which he never spoke but in terms expressing the greatest grief, tempered, however, by resignation to the will of God.

It appeared that several years ago his daughter had been severely attacked by a malarious fever, contracted while on a visit to the Eternal City. Her life was despaired of, and in a moment of rashness she made

a vow to devote herself wholly to religion in a severe monastic order, in case of her recovery.

She conquered her sickness, and in spite of every opposition, prepared to fulfil her vow.

In vain her father argued and entreated—all was useless ; and though she uttered a sigh of regret at the thought of all she was leaving, still she remained fixed in her determination to become a nun.

The convent of the Poor Clares at Monza was fixed on as her place of seclusion, and thither she had repaired a few weeks before Philibert's arrival.

The Baron was deeply pained on hearing the inflexible resolution of Clare, and ventured to suggest that, as she was yet but a novice, she might be persuaded to quit the Abbey.

The Marquis, however, replied that even if she were so inclined he would not per-

mit her to do so. After her public renunciation of the world, the fact of her rescinding her resolution would dishonour her family in the eyes of all Italy ; and however dear to him might be his only daughter, the fair fame of his house was even dearer.

The Baron's heart sank when he heard these words, for he already cherished a wild hope, which he scarcely dared acknowledge even to himself.

He now skilfully turned the conversation, and expressed curiosity to view the interior of the famous priory of Monza.

The unsuspecting old man replied that on the following day he was going to see his daughter, and would be happy to afford Philibert an opportunity of inspecting the convent.

The two Germans soon after took their leave.

When outside the castle gates, Count

Riesenburg proposed to his friend to ride on to Milan.

The Baron absently assented ; and in the course of an hour they found themselves in the crowded thoroughfares and spacious streets of the city.

He wandered listlessly through the aisles of the magnificent cathedral ; the most splendid edifices obtained from him scarce a passing glance, and all the Count's efforts failed to arouse him from the deep reverie into which he had fallen.

Towards evening they returned to Monza.

That night, when all was still, when every other eye in the little town was closed in sleep, Philibert stood alone at the open window, gazing with intense earnestness at the distant towers of the convent, silvered by the rays of the moon, which, pure and radiant, lit up the sapphire sky with her faint and languid lustre. Why did he gaze with such earnestness ? Why

did that warm flush dye his cheek, and leave it again pale as marble? Why did his heart beat with such convulsed rapidity? Why came his breath in such long-drawn gasps?

At length, uttering a deep sigh, he drew down the sash and flung himself on his couch.

Next day at the appointed hour, he mounted his horse, and riding out, met the Marquis, with a single attendant, approaching the town. He joined them, and the party, silent and absorbed by their own reflections, drew up at the gate of the convent. The horses were left in charge of the servant, and the two noblemen presently found themselves in the grounds. These were surrounded by high walls, and thickly planted with large cedars and cypresses, beneath whose shade flitted the forms of the sisterhood, clothed in their sable robes, with their white veils flutter-

ing in the wind. In the centre of the garden was a large grotto, surmounted by a little shrine, or chapel, containing an image of the Saviour and the Virgin. Before this were kneeling several nuns absorbed in mental prayer. At the extremity of the grounds rose the convent itself. It was a large compact Gothic structure, apparently of great age, for the stones were blackened, and in some places covered with moss. Above the narrow pointed windows, and from the interstices, waved long tufts of grass, which moved and nodded mournfully in the chilly blast of evening.

A sister now advanced to our visitors, and conducted them towards the large oaken door. She drew a key from her girdle, and presently they found themselves traversing a long narrow passage, hastening after the nun, who glided noiselessly over the waxed floors, her white



veil adding still more to her spirit-like and supernatural appearance. She stopped at a low oaken door, which she threw open. The Marquis entered, followed by the Baron. The nun retired, and they were left alone. The chamber was lofty, but dark ; the furniture ancient, of polished oak, and of a rich but cumbrous description. The chairs were covered with dust, as though they had not been used for many years. By the light of a lamp, which the sister had laid on the table, they discerned a grate at the farther end.

After the lapse of a quarter of an hour a face appeared. At first they were unable to discern the features ; but on moving the light closer, they saw the face of Clare Sforza, surmounted by her snowy veil.

An affectionate greeting passed between the father and daughter.

Clare's lovely countenance was suffused with crimson on recognising in the Baron of Eppenfeld the young man who had excited her attention a few days before in the convent chapel. On his part he felt emotions to which he had hitherto been a stranger, as he gazed on the pure and angelic countenance of the youthful novice.

After the lapse of half an hour the visitors departed.

On the following day he ventured to present himself again; and as he was mistaken for the Count of Manfredonia, the Marquis's son, whom he somewhat resembled, he was admitted without difficulty.

An hour passed, yet seemed scarce a minute. As he departed he promised to renew his visit at an early date.

Six days passed.


During this time the void left in Clare's heart by his absence told a truth she would

fain have denied, and forced her to own to herself that she was now far from indifferent to the handsome Teuton.

Her palpitating bosom, her heightened colour, revealed this to the Baron on the occasion of his third visit, and he ventured to declare his passion.

Clare retreated from the grate, overcome by emotion ; then, recovering herself, she again ventured to approach, and admitted in trembling accents that his love was reciprocated. He then proposed to fly, as after the public ceremony, it was hopeless to ask her father's consent to their nuptials.

At this moment, and ere she could reply, he heard a footstep in the passage, and hastily starting back he looked to the door, which slowly unclosed, and admitted the stately form of the Abbess. Whether his heightened colour and the deadly pallor of Clara's face awakened her suspicion, we will not venture to conjecture, but she returned



the youth's salutation with marked coldness, and he, seeing that it was her wish, soon after took his leave.

When he next presented himself at the gate, he was courteously but firmly refused admission, and retired moodily to his lodgings. The Count of Riesenburgh had departed several days before ; the Marquis, with the Count of Manfredonia, had left for Naples ; and as all idea of going to Rome had been dismissed, the Baron set himself to work to carry out his plan. By several indirect inquiries from a remarkably garrulous lay-sister he had on his previous visits gained a tolerably accurate acquaintance with the general plan of the convent, and of the direction in which lay the cell of Clare. Two days were passed in a consideration of his plans, and in order to quiet any suspicion which might have been entertained by the nuns, he began to prepare for his departure in a very ostentatious manner,

his attendants, with the exception of his squire Otho, being sent on to Milan, with orders, however, to turn back, repass Monza by a circuitous route, and to post themselves at a little village some ten miles off, on the road to Germany.

On the third night, having given orders to his faithful squire to await his return, he sallied out of the inn by a back door, and emerged in the principal street. It was a fine moonlight night, the stars glimmered brightly in a vault of the purest azure, and as he passed under the tall, gaunt, ghost-like dwellings, which threw their shadows in bold relief over the little street, the Baron felt his heart beat violently with mingled fear and hope. Not a soul was abroad, and Philibert passed with rapid steps through the midst of the sleeping town, till at length the lofty towers of the convent, rising clear and dark against the bright background of the sky, struck

his anxious eyes. There it stood, huge, vast, silent as the tomb, magnificent in its immensity, in its solitary grandeur appearing like the monarch of night, the guardian of the little town nestling at its feet. As he caught sight of the vast tower, Philibert quickened his steps ; wrapping his cloak more closely around him, and feeling the hilt of his sword he approached it rapidly. At length he found himself standing beneath the wall which surrounded the grounds. After a few minutes' search he found a portion in which there were various interstices, by means of which he was able to mount to the top. He let himself down by means of an overhanging branch, and found himself in the centre of the belt of trees by which the garden was surrounded.

After listening intently in order to ascertain that he was alone, Philibert stealthily emerged from the shade. The bright rays of the moon shone down on the numerous

grottoes, and illuminated with a fairy brilliancy the shrine of the Virgin and the little fountain sparkling beneath. Philibert hastily crossed the closely-shaven turf, and placed himself in the shade of a lofty ash that grew at one corner of the building below Clare's window, which was about fifteen feet from the ground.

He thought he had been unobserved, but it was not so, for one of the men employed in the garden happened to be lingering about, and saw the Baron's figure as he stealthily approached along the gravelled walk.

He immediately conjectured that some extraordinary circumstance had caused his approach, and after a few moments he decided to follow his steps, and if possible discover his intentions.

He accordingly stole round under the shade of the trees, and proceeding with great caution, he arrived within a few paces

of that beneath which Philibert stood, and in such a position that every word spoken should be distinctly audible. Clare's cell was placed at some distance from those of the rest of the community, the adjacent rooms being entirely empty, so that the Baron, having acquainted himself with these facts, had but little fear of attracting attention. He produced a small guitar from beneath his cloak, and after a rapid prelude, sang in a low, yet distinct voice, the following

LINES.

- " 'Tis lovely night, to lovers dear,  
So calm, so lone, so fair ;  
My dim eyes towards thy window peer,  
Hope paints thee smiling there.
- " The moon her mellow radiance lends,  
The beauteous scene to grace ;  
The tall majestic cedar bends  
'Neath zephyr's soft embrace.
- " A thousand bright and sparkling gems  
O'er heaven's blue vault are spread ;  
The flow'rs are slumbering on their stems,  
Each droops its folded head.



"No sound is heard to break the trance  
     That all my soul pervades ;  
 No form intrudes, no steps advance  
     Along the garden glades.

"And yet one gem is unreveal'd,  
     The richest, brightest one ;  
 The queen of all remains conceal'd,  
     The heavens have lost their sun.

"Oh ! speak, my eager soul doth wait  
     The music of thy voice ;  
 My inmost soul's with hope elate,  
     Oh ! bid my heart rejoice.

"Oh come, nor obdurate remain ;  
     The precious moments flee  
 As rivers seek th' engulphing main ;  
     My thoughts e'er flow towards thee."

## CHAPTER VI.

SCARCELY had the last sounds of the instrument died away on the night air, than the window was slowly raised, and the figure of Clare appeared in the moonlight, clad in her monastic dress. The Baron was unable to suppress a joyful exclamation as he beheld her, and, advancing beneath her cell, gazed upon her long and silently. At this moment the concealed spy incautiously moved nearer to obtain a closer view of the actors in this mysterious drama. The slight rustle of the branches aroused Philibert from his reverie. He turned sharply round and listened intently, whilst the watcher remained regarding him with agonising terror, for he felt that if he were discovered, as seemed most

probable, he would never leave the spot alive. He could scarcely restrain a cry of satisfaction when he heard the Baron exclaim, as he turned away carelessly :

“’Tis but the wind amidst the leaves.  
Why am I thus fearful ?”

At that moment something fell softly on the grass at the German’s feet.

On picking it up he found it to be the end of a ladder composed of very fine twisted cord. He seized it eagerly, and, placing himself completely in the shade, he began to ascend. In the course of a few seconds he stepped into the cell, drew in the ladder, and closed the window.

Seated on a pallet, placed in a slanting position, he beheld the Lady Clare. She raised her beautiful countenance now, pale as death, and he perceived that the tears were coursing down her cheeks.

He advanced towards her, and, dropping on one knee by her side, endeavoured to

seize her hand. She drew it away hastily, and made a movement as if about to withdraw.

“ Oh ! Philibert !—what have I done ?” she sobbed—“ what have I done ? I, who had hoped that the world and all its cares were for ever shut out from me. And my father, what would he say if he knew that his daughter brought reproach on his hitherto unsullied name ?”

“ Do not torture yourself with such fancies, dearest Clare,” said the Baron, endeavouring to calm her. “ You are not yet bound for life to the Order ; you are but a novice, and may leave at any moment, and return to the world without reproach.”

“ Oh no !—you know not what you say !” she cried. “ Though I have not yet pronounced my solemn vows, they are, nevertheless, registered in heaven, and are as binding as if I had taken them before the altar. When I entered this retreat I

made a solemn oath to God never to quit it more." Pausing for a moment, she exclaimed : " Why did I not see you before ? I had found nothing but weariness in life before I entered here."

" It is not too late !" he cried, gazing on her passionately. " Fly with me, far from this cold and stern convent ! Fly with me to Germany, and I will make you the happiest of women. Do not hesitate," he continued. " See me on my knees before you. My life, my wealth, my estate, are all yours. Henceforth I shall exist but for you, and for your welfare !"

Her colour came and went, her eyes rested alternately on the ground and raised themselves to his face. Her love at length overcame all ; her vows, her oaths—all vanished in an instant, and, yielding to the impulse of her affection, she cast herself into his outstretched arms.

He encircled her with his embrace. A

wild thrill of pleasure shot through his breast, and Clare felt his burning lips pressed against her own. Her pulse throbbed with that unspeakable, ecstatic delight which is felt but once in a lifetime. She felt she would have died had he not released her.

He seated himself on the bed beside her, and poured into her now willing and attentive ear his promises of love and fidelity. He then told her his plans. He thought that their departure should take place at once, for, though her passion was now excited, it might easily give place to remorse and aversion. He acquainted her with his scheme—that he would leave Monza on the morrow, with as much ostentation and publicity as possible, and take the road to Milan. In the night, however, he would return; his horses, ready harnessed, would await him outside the town, whilst he, with a single trusted follower, would ride to the

convent. He should leave the man behind to hold the horses, and would enter the grounds alone, and bear her away with him.

She manifested a little reluctance on hearing the scheme, but, by dint of his persuasive eloquence, it was overcome, and she consented to accompany him.

At length day began to dawn, and Philibert, fearing to make a longer stay, embraced Clare tenderly, descended into the grounds, left them safely, and reached his lodgings before the bell of the convent struck one.

On the following day the Abbess was duly informed of all the circumstances of the preceding night. Her surprise and indignation were scarcely equalled by her natural fears of a rencounter taking place in the hallowed precincts of the convent. Nevertheless, she resolved to seize the Baron, and, if possible, hand him over to

justice, and at the same time to endeavour, by remonstrance, to recall Clare to a sense of duty.

She accordingly ordered her informant to place himself with two comrades in ambush, so as if possible to intercept the fugitives. The day, which from the excited state of his mind would have hung heavily on Philibert, was passed in making preparations as had been previously arranged. The Baron left for Milan, his squire having previously purchased a light travelling coach, which was placed in charge of his train at a village a few miles beyond the town of Monza. In the dusk of the evening the Lord of Eppenfeld, attended by his squire Otho, in whom he placed implicit trust, quitted the city. The Baron, totally ignorant of the discovery of his plans, and of the means taken to frustrate them, rode with such impetuosity that they arrived in Monza



nearly an hour before the appointed time. His impatience, however, would brook no delay, and leaving Otho with the horses, he mounted the wall, and in a few seconds stood inside. He walked across the garden and gained Clare's cell without difficulty, as the men placed on the watch had not as yet posted themselves.

Philibert found Clare in a state of deep despondency. Freed from the influence of his presence she had reconsidered her former resolution, and was pacing the narrow limits of her cell in a state of painful irresolution. At one moment she resolved to risk all; at another she resolved to remain. On hearing the voice of her lover she debated for an instant as to whether she should lower the ladder, but her fatal passion revived on hearing the tones of his voice, her affection gained the ascendancy, and in a few moments Philibert was at her side. Dismayed at first by her

wavering resolves, the Baron soon recovered his assurance. The prospect of losing the long-sought prize at the moment when it seemed within his grasp excited and spurred him on. He cast himself at her feet, and seizing her trembling hand in his, he pressed it to his beating heart. In words of burning eloquence, he implored her not to pause when their wishes were so near accomplishment. He declared that her love would secure his complete happiness, while, if refused, suicide would be his only refuge from a life which would be henceforth miserable without her.

Clare listened, trembling with emotion ; but so terrible was the conflict at that instant taking place within her heart, that she was unable to utter a single word.

Time passed on without either perceiving its rapid flight. The clock struck twelve. As the strokes, slow and solemn, vibrated in his ear, the Baron became alive

to the necessity of haste. During the last few moments the young girl seemed more disposed than previously to yield to his argument.

No time must be lost, the morning was approaching, and if he hesitated Clare might change her mind, and oppose him. It was necessary to place her in a position whence there was no retreat. He let down the rope-ladder, and lifting her in his arms he walked over to the window. At that moment he thought he heard steps advancing down the corridor. The Mother Abbess was about to enter Clare's cell.

He stepped on the rung of the ladder, and, descending two or three steps at a time, he dropped on the turf, and ran hastily across the plot of grass. He had scarcely reached the centre when he heard a shout, the almost simultaneous report of two musketoons, and a bullet whistled past his ear. Four men issued from the copse-

wood, and calling on him in a loud tone to stop, began running towards him. Philibert was armed with his pistols and dagger, but his object was escape, so that the shouts of the pursuers only made him hasten the faster. He gained the shelter of the trees, but here a most serious difficulty arose. There was no ready means of crossing the wall ; for before he could get over the men would be upon him. Hardly knowing what he did he changed his course, and skirted along the wall. Meanwhile the Abbess had discovered the flight of Clare. The whole convent was roused, and the clanging of the great iron bell, calling the townspeople to the assistance of the nuns, vibrated like a death-knell in the ears of the Baron. In a few moments the villagers would come flocking in, and then all would be lost. Philibert almost wished he had not made his rash attempt, but glancing at the pale, beauti-

ful face of his loved Clare, who had fainted in his arms, he clenched his teeth, and drawing a pistol, swore that he would sell his life dearly. He had almost resigned all hope of escape, he heard the voices of his enemies hallooing to each other in various parts of the grounds, come closer and closer. Suddenly he stumbled across something covered by the early decaying leaves swept off the trees.

He stooped to examine it. Oh, joy ! it was a small ladder evidently forgotten there some time before, and thrown in his way as if by Providence in the hour of his sorest need. He put it up and mounted the wall. Heedless of the risk he ran, he called thrice in a voice that resounded high above the tumult—"Otho ! Otho ! Otho !"

How anxiously he waited.

The convent-bell still continued to peal with uninterrupted energy. In the town he heard cries and shouts, while dark

figures, waving torches in their hands, were seen advancing along the road. What if one of them were to pass where he stood? A fierce smile came over the Baron's lips, and he grasped his pistol with a tighter clutch. At that moment the sound of horses' hoofs reached his ear.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE FLIGHT.

IN another moment Otho drew up his steed by the side of the wall.

"Take her," whispered Philibert under his breath, for at that moment the sounds of some one forcing his way through the branches fell upon his ear, which anxiety, and the necessity of caution, had rendered more than usually sensitive. The squire took the lady, and the Baron sprang into the saddle. Just as they rode off, the head of a man appeared. It was one of the garden labourers of the convent. He saw the retreating forms of the cavaliers, as they disappeared in the gloom, and instantly guessed that they were the persons for whom search

was being made. Anxious to distinguish himself by a zeal which he hoped would not go unrewarded, he raised his gun, and fired after the fugitives, at the same time crying, "Stop them, stop them!" with all his might. The report brought several people to the spot, and these, hearing the account of the man, raised the alarm. Headed by the workmen, a considerable body of the townsmen set out in pursuit. They were variously armed with whatever weapons lay in their way, and were mostly on foot.

Otho, bearing the still senseless form of Clare, led, followed closely by the Baron. In consequence of the crowds thronging the street, all idea of passing through Monza was out of the question, and they directed their course towards Milan. They galloped along for an hour, and taking an obscure by-way were fortunate enough to meet no one. The tolling of the bell, the cries and



shouting of the multitude, were borne to their ears more faintly at every stride of the horses, till at length they ceased altogether. Philibert reined in his foaming steed, and consulted with the esquire as to his next step.

After a few moments' deliberation it was resolved to return by the circuitous route pursued by the carriage, with which they hoped to come up in an hour. They accordingly crossed several fields, and at length struck on the right path. They put the animals on their mettle, and moved along at full speed. All was silent and still as death. The golden corn ready for the sickle waved in the fields, the light wind scarcely put in motion the foliage of the trees laden with fruit, standing on either side of the road. The silver moon seemed from the cerulean vault to gaze with peculiar pleasure upon the beautiful panorama. But Philibert heeded not the melancholy beauty

of the scene; his thoughts were all of the perilous position in which Clare and himself were placed. He knew well what would be their fate if retaken—the scourge, the rack, the headsman's sword, rose before his imagination. On the one hand were death, disgrace, ignominy; on the other, life, honour, wealth. He played a perilous game with the odds all against him. If he won, happiness was his; if he lost, destruction inevitable was his fate.

Thus ruminating, his ear caught the distant peal of bells borne across the fields on the breeze. They were passing Monza. Philibert involuntarily grasped his pistol, and looked around as if he expected to see an enemy spring from amongst the trees; but no one appeared. He urged Otho to greater speed. He sank the spurs into his horse's flanks. The maddened steed plunged wildly forward, snorting with pain, and soon they were out of hearing of the sounds

that caused so much apprehension to the Baron. At last they regained the high-road. Otho drew rein near an impending rock, and drawing a whistle from his pocket, blew a shrill prolonged note. The sound of carriage wheels fell on the ears of the impatient Baron, and in a few minutes a large, but, for the times, light and strongly-built chariot, drawn by six horses, and escorted by four mounted troopers, turned a corner of the road.

It drew up close to him. The Baron, without a word, dismounted, took Clare in his arms, and sprang in, shutting the door. Otho fastened the reins of the charger to his own. The postillions were ready, and only awaited orders to start.

“To C——!” shouted the Baron.

The whips cracked, the carriage wheeled slowly round, the horses’ hoofs clattered on the road, and followed by the horsemen, the vehicle rolled rapidly forward, oscillating

and jolting in a manner calculated to raise a question as to whether it might not presently be upset.

The young man now turned all his care to the lady. Clare was yet insensible, but in the course of half an hour she slowly unclosed her eyes. They fell on the pale and anxious face of the Baron. She started ; but seeming to remember what had occurred, she reclosed them with a hollow groan. Already remorse was setting in ; repentance followed close on the first mad transports of passion. Philibert earnestly besought her to compose herself, for he hoped, he said, that they were now beyond the reach of pursuit. At length she sufficiently revived to listen to a brief account of the escape, and of the events so quickly following on it. She shuddered and trembled violently, on hearing how close to capture they had been. At length, soothed by her lover's tranquillizing assurances, she

threw herself back on the cushions and slept.

The first grey tints of approaching dawn appeared in the sky. Philibert frequently put his head out of the window, lest they should be attacked unawares, but no signs of pursuit were to be seen. The sun rose in all his splendour and glory, the darkness fled at his approach, the clouds rolled away, day began his reign. They halted at a little village early in the morning, partook of a hasty breakfast, changed horses, and immediately set out again. They travelled night and day, for Philibert was apprehensive of pursuit. At length the lofty peaks of the Alps glittering in the rays of the sun appeared in the distance. The Baron uttered an exclamation of joy, and urged the postillions to use still greater expedition.

At the foot of the range the carriage and horses were left behind, and our travellers commenced the ascent on mules trained for

the purpose. It was evening when they took their farewell of Italy. The sun, fiery red, was sinking behind the mountains, shedding his parting rays on the snowy summits of the Alpine chain. From the elevation on which they stood, the Baron and his companion were enabled to overlook the country below, through which they had recently passed. There, bathed in the mellow rays of evening, lay Italy in all her splendour. Far as the eye could reach stretched the wide campaign of Lombardy—one vast garden. Gentle undulations, covered with luxuriant vegetation, diversified the flatness of the plain. They stood still and silent as they gazed on the magnificent prospect. A tear coursed down Clare's cheek as she took what she felt to be her last look on the land of her birth. She felt a dry, choking sensation in her throat, and turned abruptly away. Sad forebodings, for which she could not account, came over

her. She felt she was destined never again to behold her country or her home, but was to die an exile in a far-off foreign land.

Philibert observed her painful emotion, and, rightly guessing the cause, he gave orders to proceed.

They crossed the mountains in safety, and entered Switzerland. At length the whole party arrived at Eppenfeld. As the Baron rode into the courtyard of the Castle he was greeted with shouts of welcome, which were redoubled at the sight of his destined bride.

Some days after, the Baron summoned numbers of the neighbouring gentry to the fortress, on the occasion of his union with Clare Sforza. The marriage was celebrated with great pomp and splendour in the Castle chapel. The beauty, grace, and modest demeanour of the bride, excited universal admiration. Many were the conjectures concerning her ; but the Baron had

given strict orders to the servants who had accompanied him to preserve an absolute silence on whatever they knew relating to the affair. He himself invented a fictitious story, which he related to his friends and acquaintances.

The guests of the lord of the Castle retired to the great hall, where was served up a magnificent collation, while on the green, before the drawbridge, a feast was spread, of which the tenantry partook. Most of the knights and gentlemen invited remained at Eppenfeld for the ensuing week, during which the time was taken up with a continual round of festivities. Hunts, amusements, feasting and jollity occupied the time, and the revellers, tired out with dissipation, only rose in the morning to recommence a fresh day of excitement and rioting.

At length, however, they departed, and the life of the inmates of the Castle resumed its accustomed course.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE SIREN.

A YEAR and a half passed away, and a son was born to inherit the honours of the Eppenfels. He became the idol of his father's affection. Every care and every indulgence that the love of his parents could suggest was lavished on this first scion of their house; but, notwithstanding all their attentions, young Alberio, whose health had always been delicate, died suddenly, at the age of three years. The Baroness, who during his lifetime had been so absorbed in her child as to have but little time for other considerations, now became melancholy and sad. She looked upon the death of Alberic as a punishment

for her sin in breaking the oath solemnly made to God when she entered the convent at Monza. She kept her chamber during the greater part of the day, and seldom quitted it but at meal-times, or to take solitary walks in the grounds. She became pale and worn; her eyes, unnaturally large and bright, evidenced the internal fever with which she was consumed. The Baron, too, had received a terrible shock in the unexpected death of his son. The behaviour of his wife, her fading beauty, and her continual reproaches, irritated his sullen and gloomy temper. He became harsh and arbitrary in his treatment of the servants and retainers. Instead of the love and affection with which he had been formerly regarded, he now inspired fear and aversion into the minds of the vassals. The whole Castle seemed to be affected by the change which had so suddenly come over its lord. Every-

thing wore an air of sadness and desolation.

Thus another year passed away, and Christmas arrived. The Count of Riesen-  
burg proposed celebrating Yule-tide with  
the customary festivities and rejoicing.  
To that end he invited large numbers of  
his friends and acquaintances to spend the  
festival at his castle. Amongst others,  
the Baron of Eppenfeld received an in-  
vitation. He debated awhile as to whether  
he should accept it or not, but at length  
resolved to do so, as it would form an  
agreeable variation to the dulness and  
monotony of the last twelve months. The  
Baroness declined going, and accordingly,  
on the 23rd of December, Philibert, with  
a small train of followers, set out for his  
friend's residence.

On the evening of the second day he rode  
across the drawbridge of Riesenburg. The  
courtyard of the Castle was thronged with

the servants and the horses of the Count's friends. Fresh parties were continually arriving, and whilst the stewards and ushers conducted them to their apartments, the grooms and attendants saw after the stabling of the steeds and their retainers' accommodation. The Baron was shown to his bedroom immediately, where he changed his travelling-dress. He then proceeded to the reception-room, where a large number of the guests had already arrived.

The Count received his old friend with the greatest cordiality and warmth; he introduced him to several of the company, and altogether treated him with marked distinction.

On Christmas morning high Mass was celebrated in the chapel of the Castle, where all the gentlemen and ladies assisted at the ceremony. In the evening a splendid banquet was spread in the Castle hall.

The Yule log was solemnly blessed, and then dragged into the hall and placed on the hearth. The servants in the kitchen enjoyed themselves with no less zest than their masters, ample provisions for a feast, with abundance of Rhenish, to which they did full justice, having been placed at their disposal by order of the Count. Not a few of the gentlemen were carried to bed that night, while many of their followers took their repose on the kitchen floor. On the following morning the gentlemen, to the number of thirty, mustered in front of the Castle (each being mounted on one of the Count's horses) to take part in the boar-hunt. The huntsmen in their suits of Lincoln green and glittering baldricks, the large body of richly-attired gentlemen and ladies, each wearing at the side the *couteau de chasse*, the dogs baying deeply, while in the background frowned the grey walls and stern bulwarks of the

old Gothic fortress, its battlements thronged with mailed soldiers, and its windows enlivened by the faces of some of the ladies who remained within, and had come to witness the departure of their friends, formed a striking and beautiful *coup d'œil*. At length the Count gave the word, and the whole company set off through the fields at a gallop. They came to a halt at the border of the wood, where the chief huntsman informed his master that he had received information of a boar's haunt situated some distance off. This news was received with acclamation. The Count's proposal, that immediately after breakfast they should go in search of the animal, met with universal approbation. They now advanced into the forest, guided by the chief huntsman. They soon arrived at a wide and extensive glade. Here a plentiful repast had been spread on the grass. Pheasants, game of various kinds, with an

abundant supply of Rhenish and Hungarian wine (tea and coffee being then almost unknown in Western Europe), composed a very substantial breakfast in the very substantial style of our ancestors.

The party seated themselves on the sward without ceremony, and commenced an attack on the savoury viands, with appetites sharpened by the ride from the Castle. The conversation became general, and as the flasks were opened and emptied of their sparkling contents, the woods and solitary dells echoed sounds of mirth and hilarity not often heard in their lonely recesses. Philibert, who had recovered for the time much of the gay light-heartedness of years gone by, found himself beside a lady of some thirty years of age, who had been introduced to him as Madame von Rautzan. She was the widow of Sir Conrad Rautzan, a former friend of Count Riesenbourg. From the first the

Baron had been struck with her appearance. Her tall yet shapely form was displayed to peculiar advantage in her hunting costume ; her complexion was beautifully fair, while her long flaxen hair, unconfined by coif or head-dress, fell in profusion over her shoulders. The eyes were of a deep blue, and were, as well as her aquiline nose and slightly compressed lips, indicative of more resolution and strength of mind than usually falls to the lot of woman. Yet there was an indefinite something, a nameless expression not to be found in any particular feature, but as it were spread over the whole face, that excited a species of repulsion, an unaccountable fear and mistrust, in the attentive observer. Still she was undeniably beautiful, so much so, indeed, that the envious glances bestowed on her by the other ladies were many and penetrating, a fair criterion, if not of moral worth, at least of personal comeliness.



Almost unconsciously the Baron fell into conversation with her, and was no less charmed by her wit and erudition, than by her external appearance. More than once he caught himself gazing intently, almost rudely, into her face. She saw it too, and resolved, from motives of her own, rather to fan than to repress the flame which she perceived to be about to spring up in the young man's breast.

At the end of an hour the chief huntsman approached the Count of Riesenbourg, and informed him that everything was ready for commencing the sport.

The Count communicated the intelligence to his friends, who, eager to begin, rose from the ground and mounted their horses, which had been fastened to the trees close at hand. The dogs were brought forth, and the company entered the wood. Soon, however, they broke up into little groups of two or three. It was an excellent oppor-

tunity for a *tête-à-tête*—and one which the young gallants of the company did not allow to pass. Philibert soon found himself riding by the side of Madame Rautzan.

The enchantress had cast her spells over the unfortunate man, with fatal effect. He listened with eagerness to every word that fell from her lips ; he watched her every motion ; his face was flushed, as he drank in the poison, delicious as Hymettian honey, but deadly as hemlock-juice. His young and beautiful wife, who had once inspired him with so much love, his duties as a husband—all were forgotten in that moment of wild, impetuous passion.

Madame Rautzan feigned not to notice his prepossession, but dexterously contrived to turn their discourse in a manner calculated to promote the ends which she had in view. Half an hour thus passed undisturbed. The huntsmen, meanwhile, had surrounded the boar's lair, and, after some

trouble, succeeded in rousing him. With an enraged roar, the huge, unwieldy beast rushed from covert. The dogs were in full cry behind, while on every side were heard the shouts of the pursuers.

Philibert heard the tumult in front, coming nearer and nearer. He reined-in his horse and waited.

There was a crashing among the bushes as of some heavy body forcing its way through. Madame Rautzan's steed trembled all over ; it snorted with fear, and suddenly bounded away. So unexpected had been this movement that the rider was thrown off on the ground, while the frightened animal, snorting with terror, disappeared amidst the trees. At the same instant the boar issued from the underwood. The lady was right in his path. His small, round, cruel eyes blazed with fury, as, uttering a savage grunt, he rushed towards her. Her destruction seemed inevitable.

A despairing cry burst from the Baron. He flung himself from his horse, and threw himself in the path of the enraged monster. His hunting-knife glittered in the air; it descended, and was buried to the haft in the animal's heart. The boar rolled over on the grass—dead. When the pursuers came up they found Philibert assisting Madame Rautzan, who had fainted, to rise. They were all profuse in their expressions of sympathy with the sufferer, and, having received from Philibert a short account of the affair, highly praised the gallantry and devotion which he had displayed. Even the hitherto cold, artificial, selfish heart of Madame Rautzan was touched, and with her eyes she gave her deliverer a look which amply repaid him for any risk he had run. The hunting-party remained some time longer in the wood, but were unable to meet with another boar, and towards evening they returned to the Castle. The ad-

venture in the morning was the theme in every one's mouth, and the conduct of the Baron was highly praised by all.

But Philibert thought not of their approval or censure ; he remembered only the look of Madame Rautzan ; that look almost bewildered his mind. The next day, the day after, and during the remainder of his stay at the Count's, he was constantly in her company, and his assiduity became so marked as to be observed and commented on by the guests. But the Baron was deaf and blind to every other object but to the idol which he had set up to worship.

On the last day of Christmas week there was to be a grand tournament given by the Count of Riesenbourg, in honour of his friends. Preparations had been going on for some time beforehand. In front of the Castle the lists were marked out and surrounded by a wooden paling, whilst a large pavilion, covered with scarlet cloth,

was erected at one end for the gentlemen and ladies invited. At the other extremity a similar structure, but of much smaller size, was placed for the accommodation of the umpires.

At length the long-expected morning dawned. At an early hour the lists were surrounded by a large and impatient crowd, composed chiefly of rustics and tenantry of the estate.

A little before noon the ladies, and those of the gentlemen who did not intend to take part in the tourney, seated themselves in the pavilion. The minutes passed slowly away, till, as the great clock struck the hour of twelve, the portcullis of the gateway was raised, and the knights, cased in steel, with their vizards raised, rode slowly across the drawbridge two abreast, each being followed by a squire bearing his shield. A tremendous cheer rent the air as the champions entered the arena and

took up their stations beneath the pavilion. The jostling and crushing outside the barriers was so great that had they not been firmly fixed, they must have yielded to the pressure. The knights conversed both by words and signs with those seated in the pavilion. The ladies waved their handkerchiefs, and by their looks and gestures encouraged the combatants to do their devoir, while the cavaliers, bending low in the saddle, in polite acknowledgment, promised to demean themselves bravely in the coming contest. Suddenly a loud fanfare was heard, and two heralds, in rich tabards, and bearing silver trumpets, rode into the arena. Behind them, mounted on a snow-white palfrey, richly caparisoned, came the Count of Riesenbourg and two old knights who were to act as umpires. Amidst profound silence, the Count leisurely advanced across the lists, sprang from his horse, which was led away by a page, and fol-

lowed by his two friends, ascended the tribune.

It was a moment of excitement for all present; the spectators looking anxiously towards their favourite champions, the cavaliers waiting in anxiety for the order to commence. Philibert was there, wearing a richly inlaid suit of armour. He glanced from time to time at a certain part of the stand, where, silent and thoughtful, sat Madame von Rautzan. He set his teeth close, and vowed to carry off the prize to lay it at her feet.

He might well have felt diffident and doubtful under the circumstances. He was about to be opposed to some of the best tilters in Europe—men who had spent their lives on the battle-field—who, from their youth, had been inured to every kind of hardship and fatigue, whilst he was comparatively unpractised and unskilled in those arts in which they had so laboriously perfected themselves.



The tournament was to begin with a series of single encounters between various knights, the victor in each encounter opposing a fresh adversary. The first two champions now placed themselves at opposite ends of the enclosure. One was an Englishman, and the other a French knight, called the *Sieur de Castannes*. Each was presented with lance and shield, and both with closed vizors, remained upright and immovable as statues of steel, awaiting the signal.

The Count dropped his truncheon, a loud flourish of trumpets was heard, and the two cavaliers, amidst a cloud of sand, rode furiously at each other. They met in the centre of the lists; the Englishman's lance flew to splinters against the shield of his adversary, and he was violently hurled to the ground. Amidst a perfect storm of applause the successful combatant rode back slowly, and resumed his former posi-

tion, whilst the fallen knight was carried away insensible. Several other encounters succeeded, in all of which Castannes proved himself victorious, till he was overthrown by a gigantic German—the Baron of Breiderwald. The knights were then divided into two parties, one stationed below the umpires, the other below the ladies' gallery.

At the sound of the herald's trumpet they dashed together.

In a few moments the lists presented a strange appearance. Riderless horses, maddened by the uproar, rushed wildly round the barriers; the sand was strewn with the figures of the knights who had been unhorsed, some endeavouring to rise, others lying motionless, whilst the combatants, amidst clouds of dust, rode at one another at full speed. The noise was deafening. At every alternation of the combat arose the shouts and exclamations of the lookers-on, encouraging now one champion,

now another, whilst the shouted challenges of the knights, the crash of the encounter, the neighing of the steeds, the cries of the wounded, augmented the general uproar.

Frequently the hostile warriors were concealed by clouds of sand and dust, and all that was visible was a confused mass of glittering steel and coloured plumes, till, as the obscurity cleared away, several more knights might be observed struggling on the ground.

Philibert had been unusually fortunate : already three chevaliers had gone down before his arm, when he saw opposite him the *Sieur Gondomar de Castannes*. Shouting his challenge, he put his lance in rest, and rode at the Frank. The shock was violent—the Baron reeled and swayed in the saddle, but, recovering his equilibrium, he again placed himself in position for a fresh struggle. This time he was more successful, for his lance struck the other's casque with so

much force and precision that Castannes fell from his horse, amidst cries of surprise and congratulation. Shortly after the Baron overthrew the redoubtable Breiderwald, and urged on his troop to further exertion, till, in a few minutes, not a single combatant remained to oppose them.

Loud and prolonged were the cheers that greeted these achievements. After a few moments' deliberation with the other knights, Count Riesenburg rose from his chair and proclaimed that the prize of the tournament had been won by Philibert, Baron of Eppenfeld.

At these words fresh applause burst forth, in the midst of which the Baron, armed at all points, but without his casque, rode gracefully to the judges' stand. The Count rose, and with a smile handed to the successful cavalier a magnificent chaplet of pearls, and a richly-chased sword ornamented with gold and ivory. The

Baron bowed profoundly, and springing from his steed, walked across the lists. He mounted the steps leading to the grand pavilion and advanced quickly through the midst of the crowd of ladies till he came to where sat Madame Rautzan. Dropping on one knee he tendered her the circlet. She turned alternately red and pale, and in a confused and embarrassed manner thanked him for his gift. This evident proof that she in some degree reciprocated a feeling which in Philibert's breast had already become of too warm a character to be called by the name of mere friendship, affected him so much that he retired from the pavilion without even hearing the murmurs of astonishment which his action had called forth. The proceedings were now at an end, and the company retired to the Castle, while the peasantry shortly afterwards dispersed to their various homes.

Next day the greater part of the guests

left the Castle, and Riesenbourg relapsed into its usual tranquil state.

Before his departure, Philibert invited Madame Rautzan to spend some weeks at Eppenfeld, a proposition to which she eagerly acceded.

She had at first attempted the conquest of the Baron's heart from selfish and interested motives, but her cold soul, hitherto susceptible of no love, but of self, had caught the magic flame, and now glowed with a passion for Philibert, no less ardent than that which he had conceived for her.

## CHAPTER IX.

OVER six months had elapsed since the occurrence of the events just related, when, on the evening of a sultry day in July, as the sun, which had shone with extreme fierceness during the day, was sinking in the west as a lurid ball of fire, suffusing the clouds with a rich crimson glow, and throwing its expiring gleams slantwise on the grey time-worn turrets and bastions of the ancient feudal keep, the foremost of a small party advanced towards the drawbridge of the Castle of Eppenfelfd, and, taking his horn, blew a loud and prolonged blast. Ere the echoes died away in the distance, the figure of a warder appeared behind the bars of the

portcullis, and having made an examination of the other, abruptly asked, "Whom he came from, and what he wanted?"

"I come," replied the horseman, "from the Lady Adelaide von Rautzan, who follows me close behind, and desires to see your master, the Baron of Eppenfeld."

The warder made no response, but proceeded to Philibert's presence and informed him of the lady's arrival.

It may be imagined with what joy Philibert heard these tidings. The last six months had been so much the more dull on account of the excitement by which they had been preceded; and it was with undisguised pleasure that he ordered the man to admit the strangers, and to see that they and their suite received proper care and attention. At the same time he left the hall and proceeded to ascend to the battlements. He placed himself just above the great gateway, through which the cavalcade must



pass. He saw the party in the valley beneath, just commencing the ascent of the hill.

He easily distinguished Madam Rautzan, who rode first, mounted on a cream-coloured palfrey with velvet trappings, whilst the rest of the party, consisting of three domestics, advanced at some distance behind.

He watched them for some time, till, as they emerged on the brow of the hill, he descended into the courtyard, in order to be the first to welcome his guest.

The drawbridge was lowered, the portcullis was drawn up, and Adelaide, followed by her attendants, rode slowly into the courtyard. Philibert himself assisted her to dismount, and conducted her into the Castle with many courteous thanks for the honour she did him. Poor Clare, on hearing the warder announce the approach of one of whom hitherto she had never heard her husband speak,

had involuntarily looked up from the embroidery-frame at which she was then engaged, she noticed the joy with which Philibert received the news, and her heart misgave her as she saw him hastily quit the room, for in spite of all her lost peace of mind the young Italian loved the Baron still, and her inflammable nature was ready to take fire at the idea of his having fixed his affections on another. Whilst in this state of agitation she heard the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs, a moment after the door was thrown open, and the Baron entered, his face wearing a smile, to which it had been long an utter stranger. Madame Rautzan leaned on his arm. She was attired in a plain but becoming fashion, and the long ride leant to her cheeks a healthy glow, which still further enhanced her beauty.

Clare seemed instantly to recognise a rival, for she stared full at the stranger,

who replied by a glance more menacing than words, and it was not till reminded by the voice of Philibert, that Clare was sufficiently recalled to go through the ceremony of an introduction.

During the rest of the evening the lord of the Castle was remarkably gay and animated, his wife sad and silent, and endeavouring to hide the pangs of anguish and jealousy which she experienced, whilst Adelaide Rautzan was revolving in her own mind how she should begin the struggle in which she had determined to win or to die. Under an exterior of gaiety and thoughtless mirth, she was planning with fiendish art the means of overthrowing Clare, and of becoming mistress of the Castle of Eppenfeld.

Clare retired early to her apartment, but the night was far advanced ere either the Baron or Adelaide sought their couches.

## CHAPTER X.

Two persons on horseback were riding slowly through the grounds below the Castle of Eppenfeld. One was a young and fine-looking man, richly attired, the other a woman of remarkable beauty and grace.

“Oh, Adelaide!” exclaimed the former, reining in his horse, and gazing with rapture on the exquisitely charming features of his companion, “you know not how I love you ; how my soul pants for the moment when it can possess you ! You cannot, do not, understand how eagerly I would yield up all I have, wealth, and power, and state, if I could but call thee mine, or rather, if I could surrender myself

to the intoxication of thy charms—a willing slave. But, alas ! alas ! it can never be.”

“I know, Philibert,” she replied. “I know it but too well. That you love me, I doubt not, but, believe me, you cannot regard me with more affection than I do you. Ah ! it were better we had never met, since cruel circumstances forbid our union.”

“Not so, not so !” cried he vehemently ; “I should thus have been deprived of some of the happiest moments of my existence. From the first hour I gazed on you, I loved with all the ardour of a new, yet with the deeply-rooted strength, of an old, affection. Do not then say, oh my adored Adelaide, that it was better we had never seen each other.”

“Unfortunately it is too true, Philibert ; the world forbids you to think of me. You are married.”

“Do not remind me of it !” cried he, with a fierce energy which made his companion

shudder. "I feel it daily grow a heavier and more insupportable burthen. When I gaze on you my soul is ravished with celestial joy, and I yearn to fall at your feet ; but a voice within me whispers the accursed words, ' You are married ! you are married ! ' —and the bright illusion melts away like a dream !"

"Yes, a dream, Philibert ; nothing—nothing but a dream."

"Do not say so !" answered the infatuated lover. "Who knows what may happen ? What if *she* were to——"

"Were to—what ?" asked his companion.

"Were to—to——"

"I can divine the meaning of your words, Philibert ; you would say, if your wife were to die."

"I did not say that," answered the Baron in a low, husky voice.

"I can guess your meaning, nevertheless."

Both remained silent for some time. At length Madame Rautzan spoke. Fixing her piercing eyes on the young German, she said :

“ Well, if the Baroness died, and you were free, what would you do ? ”

But Philibert was so buried in thought that he made no rejoinder. The wily woman repeated her question, in a louder and more imperious tone.

The Baron started, looked around as if he feared the approach of some intruder, then, raising his eyes to the countenance of Adelaïde, he replied :

“ Why ask me such useless questions ? Why do you distrust me ? Do you doubt my love ? Were I able, I would wed you this very night. ”

“ I can no longer refuse to believe you, Philibert. You do, truly, regard me with affection. Ah ! why is it that, feeling as we do towards each other, we cannot be united ?

And yet there is a means—but no ; I will not mention it !”

“Speak ! speak !” cried the Baron, drawing his horse close beside hers. “I listen to words on which hang my destiny. In pity, speak ! Refuse me not, I implore you !”

“I cannot any longer conceal my thoughts,” rejoined the lady. “I cannot hear you plead, and delay to obey you. What I meant was that between *us*, irresistibly attracted towards each other—drawn together as the steel towards the magnet—there stands but a feeble, sickly girl as the sole obstacle in our path. Were she removed——”

“Removed—removed ! In what way removed ?”

“No need to strain my meaning !” cried she, mustering courage as the decisive moment drew nigh ; “it is sufficiently plain.”



“Can—you—think of kill——mur——der?” he whispered in a low, husky voice, with a pause between each word.

Without directly replying, Madame Rautzan proceeded :

“Once she was gone, we could then be united without fear. What would be left to mar our happiness? And it would be so easy to hide the deed! Oh that I were a man! 'Tis scarce a task beyond the strength of a woman's feeble arm. One bold stroke, and all is over. Who is to know?—who would dare to accuse the Lord of Eppenfeld?”

Philibert answered not, but these odious counsels had arrested his attention. At first he had but desired the natural death of his bride; already he was planning how he might remove her from the path of the unhallowed passion which he intended to pursue. Sometimes, indeed, thoughts of a better nature entered his mind; and as he looked on the pale, careworn features of

the young Italian, he thought of all she had sacrificed for him—how she had left father, friends, country, to follow his fortunes—he felt then some return of his ancient love warm his heart ; but again in presence of the temptress, these feelings—the last struggles of dying virtue—fled immediately, leaving him weaker, more infatuated, and less capable of resistance than before. The evil seed had been sown by the apparently careless words of the designing enchantress, and were fast springing up, ever gaining fresh vigour and increased strength, with each victory over the feeble efforts of the Baron, to free himself from the influence of the spells that bound him.”

After a sojourn of three weeks, during which she contrived to render herself almost indispensable to Philibert, Madame Rautzan left Eppenfeld. She trusted to time to work out the rest of her designs, and bring her schemes to a triumphant issue.

## CHAPTER XI.

“ My ugly guilt flies in my conscious face,  
And I am vanquished, slain by bosom war.”

N. LEE.

AFTER the departure of the unworthy object to whom he had transferred his affections, the Lord of Eppenfeld once more fell into that dejected and gloomy state from which he had been aroused by the visit to Riesenburg, and the subsequent arrival of Madame von Rautzan at his Castle. He reflected deeply on her words uttered during that morning's ride, words which remained indelibly impressed upon his memory, as though branded there with a red-hot iron.

He could not determine what to do, what to resolve upon. At one moment passion,

at another pity, and the sweet memory of a former love, were uppermost in his mind. He was not as yet a callous villain, utterly without heart ; he was a faithless husband, false alike to honour and to oath, but hitherto his hand was unstained with blood.

His wasted features, his bent figure, sufficiently indicated the awful struggle that was perpetually raging within him, alike during the silence and solitude of the night, and the dazzling glare of noonday. At one time he had nerved himself sufficiently, as he thought, to commit the odious crime.

At the hour of midnight, when all others throughout the Castle were wrapped in the silence of sleep, he seized the lamp from his table, and quitting his room, began, with unsteady steps, the long narrow winding staircase leading to his wife's chamber.

Everything throughout the fortress was buried in the gloomy stillness and unbroken

silence of the tomb. Except a ray which here and there found its way through the narrow embrasure in the thick wall, not a light was to be seen. The wind whistled without, now rising high in a sudden gust, and anon dying away with a deep moan in the distance. The Baron trembled excessively; his knees bent and shook under him, and he leant for support against the balustrade.

The horrible nature of his contemplated crime, and the terrible punishment which he feared would follow, rushed before his mind's eye, painted in the most vivid and appalling colours. He started at every sigh of the wind, and looked back fearfully into the darkness; the perspiration ran down his forehead in large heavy drops; quaking with fear and remorse, yet half ashamed of his irresolution, he stood there terrified, clutching for support at the rails. He uttered a deep groan, but by a violent effort he

forced himself to go on, and shivering with a terror to which hitherto he had been a stranger, he recommenced the ascent. At length he reached the summit of the flight; another moment and he stood outside his wife's door. He listened attentively, but heard not a sound to alarm him. Slowly, cautiously, he turned the handle, starting every time the hinge creaked, or an unusually strong gust of wind shook the window-frames. Half hiding the lamp beneath his long velvet cloak he advanced into the chamber.

Clara had thrown herself dressed on the bed. She appeared buried in a deep, but uneasy and feverish sleep. Her bosom heaved convulsively, and from time to time muttered words, amongst which the trembling assassin thought he recognised his own name, escaped her. The pale moonbeams shone into the room where the sleeper lay, and falling slantwise through the small, deep

windows, rested on the figure of the Baroness, rendering still more white and deathlike her sweetly angelic countenance. A small but glowing spot on either cheek indicated the fever by which she was consumed, a slow fever nourished and kept up by the oil of mental grief.

The Baron felt a sharp and bitter pang as he gazed on this young girl, who had loved him so truly and so well, to whom he had vowed never-ending affection, and to effect whose death he had entered that apartment.

Unable to decide what to do, he stood thus several moments, gazing at the face of his unconscious wife.

At length, with a muttered imprecation on his own cowardice, he approached the bed, and, thrusting his hand into his bosom, he drew forth a small, broad-bladed stiletto.

The knife glittered for an instant in the air ; it had already begun its rapid descent,

when suddenly Clare moved, and, in a louder tone than she had hitherto employed, she uttered the word "Philibert!"

The imagination of the wretched man had been already wrought up to the highest state of excitement; he thought that she had been awakened, and had discovered all. Hastily dropping both the light and the poniard, he rushed from the room and began to descend the stairs in the dark, leaping two or three steps at a time, in his eagerness to fly from the scene of his contemplated crime. Towards the bottom of the flight his foot slipped, and he was precipitated to the ground. For several moments he remained stunned and motionless. At length consciousness began to return. Bleeding from a wound in the forehead, he staggered to his feet, and having succeeded, by dint of groping, in finding his apartment, he threw himself on his couch and endeavoured to sleep.



He passed a restless and uneasy night, and about two in the morning he fell asleep. His dreams were even more appalling than his waking thoughts, for after a slumber of three hours, during which he tossed feverishly in the bed, and muttered, from time to time, exclamations of terror, he awoke shouting "Help! help!" at the top of his voice.

The cry was heard throughout the whole building, and one of the servitors ran to the Baron's chamber whence it had issued. He found his master seated in a large leathern arm-chair; his face was pale with fright, and he perspired profusely. He heard the door open, and, raising his head, saw the man enter. He asked him, in an abrupt tone, "what he wanted there?"

The intruder answered that, "hearing a shriek from his lord's chamber, he had feared something must have happened, and had hurried thither to investigate it."

"You have been dreaming, sir," said the Baron, fixing his eyes on him, and contracting his brows angrily. "There has been no noise in this room. Go—and in future, do not let your imagination run away with your senses, or it may be the worse for you!"

He pointed to the door, through which the dependent—abashed, amazed, yet fully certain that his ears had not deceived him—hastened out. Philibert continued to walk up and down his apartment in a state of mind bordering on distraction. From the imperfect sentences that dropped from his lips from time to time, it was evident that he had had an ill-boding dream. During the remainder of the day he kept his chamber, where he took dinner. At length night came on, and, fearing to pass the hours of darkness in slumbers which only brought fresh accession to the tortures by which his mind was distracted, he stepped out upon

the terrace, extending below part of the ramparts formerly destroyed in a siege, and rebuilt in its present form by the late owner. The moat below the terrace had long been dry, and was gradually filling up. It was a glorious night. The moon, which had just risen, shed its pale silvery light from a sky of the deepest cerulean tint. Every object could be discerned with almost the same ease as at mid-day. A light breeze agitated the leaves of the trees in the grounds beneath, and swept against the weather-beaten walls of the old fortress.

The Baron had not been many minutes on the terrace when a side-door opened, and a figure, closely wrapped in a dark mantle, advanced towards him. Instinctively he drew back into the shade, and waited.

The figure passed close by him, and as it advanced a deep sigh issued from beneath the hood which half-covered the face. Philibert started, and made a step forward ; he

recognised the voice—it was that of his wife.

She was, however, too much occupied with her own thoughts to hear the noise of his foot on the gravel. She walked slowly up and down the terrace for the space of ten minutes, then once more stood still in the same place as before. Again she sighed : so deep, so hopeless was that sigh that her husband started as though he heard a voice from the tomb. She then spoke to herself, but in a tone so low that the Baron could barely catch the words ; gradually, however, as her earnestness increased she raised her voice.

“ Ah ! ” she exclaimed, looking upwards at the sky studded with stars, “ how sweet a night is this ; how it reminds me of Italy, glorious, sunny Italy, where the sun shines with such warmth and beauty, where the icy cold and the clouded firmament, the raging storm and the bitter, cutting blast, are

alike unknown ; where all is lovely and fair and rejoicing ! Oh ! why did I quit my own sunny Italy for the frost and snow of this dull, joyless Northern land ? Oh ! Italy, Italy, I shall never see thee more !” and she sobbed aloud. After a pause of a few moments she resumed her soliloquy : “ My punishment is a severe one. How happy I could have been in that convent, secluded from all the world, passing my days in prayer and mortification ; and when I came to the end of my mortal career, with what happiness could I have surveyed the past : while now——” She paused, but presently resumed : “ While now—yes, while now—why shrink from avowing it ? I have nothing to look forward to in the future, and worse than nothing to expiate in the past. Instead of enjoying the calm repose of the convent, I am now doomed to drag out a miserable existence with a man who regards me as an

obstacle to his designs, who views me with hatred rather than with affection, and who, forgetful of the vows so solemn and so oft repeated, oblivious of the most sacred oaths pledged at the foot of the altar, and of the promises by which he induced me to quit my calm and peaceful retreat, has, I fear, forgotten me, and transferred his regard to another!" (The unseen watcher turned pale, and bit his lip in mingled anger and shame, for the charge was too true not to wound him deeply.) "And shall I," she continued, "be compelled to live with this heartless man, forgetful as he is of the most sacred oaths, and who, I believe, would not hesitate to take my life, did he think that he could do so with impunity!" (Here Philibert, again conscious of his guilt, became frightfully pale.) "I might, perhaps, fly at any moment, but whither? who would receive me? And yet, in spite of all his faults, I love him still. I know I run a

risk in remaining ; I know that I am continually exposed to the plots of that woman who has obtained so fatal a mastery over Philibert, but it does not become a Sforza to fly from any danger, however dreadful it be. I submit to Thy will, O my God," she continued as she gazed upwards. "I will bear this earthly trial, this blighting of all my earthly hopes, as an expiation of my fault. I am now resolved. I will remain." She was silent again.

The clock of the Castle struck one. The noise aroused her, for she raised her head and looking anxiously round, exclaimed :

"'Tis time ; I wonder he is not here. What can have detained him ?"

At these words the Baron started, and his astonishment was considerably increased when he heard the sound of footsteps approaching, and immediately afterwards beheld the tall figure of a cavalier, covered with a dark mantle, and wearing a hat sur-

mounted by sable plumes, approaching along the terrace. The lady evidently heard the sound also, for she turned round, and uttering a joyous cry, advanced towards the stranger. They then commenced walking up and down the terrace, seemingly in earnest conversation. On one of these turns they stopped suddenly, not far from the spot where lay their hidden enemy, and the Baron heard the tall cavalier speak thus :

“ Clare, Clare, for your own sake, for mine, for the sake of your aged father, do not refuse me this request. Think on the Marquis bowed down by years, and still more by the weight of sorrow ; think on the happiness, the calm, tranquil happiness, yet within your reach, and do not bring down your parent’s white hairs to the grave, nor condemn yourself to a life of wretchedness.”

She paused an instant before replying. At length she answered :



“I would it were in my power to comply; but, alas! in spite of all his ingratitude, I cannot make up my mind to abandon Philibert—Philibert whom I once loved so well, whom, in spite of all, I love still.”

They went on, but on returning stopped again on the same spot.

“I have traced you hither many a long mile,” he said in a dejected tone. “I have searched for you at every court and in every town throughout the empire; many a weary day I spent in the vain endeavour to trace your retreat; many a weary night have I lain awake planning fresh schemes for your discovery, till the fresh hue of health had left my cheek, till the bloom of youth had given way to the sallow hue of age, till grief and anxiety had done the work of years, and sprinkled my hair with grey. And now that I have found you at last, you refuse to hear me. O Clare, can you not feel for me? can you not feel for your

father? can you not feel for the honour of the name you bear? When I set out in search of you I expected to find that a marriage begun under such auspices had turned out unhappily, but the reality, the sad truth which but a few days ago I heard from your own lips, more than confirms my worst fears. I set out in a few hours; do not let me go alone. The Marquis has assured me of his complete forgiveness of the past, if you will but return."

The curiosity of Philibert had been strangely excited by this conversation. For a time he was tóally at a loss to conceive its meaning, but at length he arrived at the conclusion that the cavalier was probably a former suitor of Clare before her entrance into the convent, perhaps an intimate friend, even a member of the Sforza family (which, indeed, seemed more likely from his bidding Clare to remember the honour of her name), and that he had come thither in order to

persuade her to return with him to Italy. At first he was rather pleased than otherwise, since the departure of his wife would leave him free to wed her rival, but when he came to reflect on the opprobrium with which his name would be for ever covered when his conduct to the former became known, his resolution to allow them to depart instantly changed.

“No !” he muttered with clenched teeth, as with dagger drawn he glided noiselessly after them in the dark shadow of the overhanging battlements—“no, I will never be held up to the scorn of the proud Sforzas. No one shall live to tell my crimes.”

He had stolen close behind the cavalier and his companion, who, all unconscious of his proximity, continued their conversation.

The lady seemed to have yielded at length to the prayers of her companion, for

Philibert heard her exclaim in a mournful voice :

“ Well, Casimir, I suppose I must yield ; I cannot be more unhappy than at Eppenfeld. Yet,” she added after a short pause, “ I feel as though I were never destined to see Italy again, as if I were never to quit this spot alive. I fear there is no rest for me but in the grave.”

At that instant a rapid but stealthy step aroused her attention. Ere she could turn round, a loud voice, harsh and guttural in its tones, shouted these words in her ear :

“ You shall have your wish. Die !”

The bright blade of a stiletto flashed before her eyes, and buried itself in her breast. With a stifled shriek she sank to the ground. This was but the work of a second. The Baron flung off his cloak and drawing his sword, advanced towards the cavalier. He, on his side, though confused by the suddenness and vehemence of

the attack, drew his weapon and placed himself on guard. The moon shone full on the countenance of the Baron, lit up as it was with hellish passion.

The Italian uttered a cry of rage as he recognised his antagonist.

“Ha! murderer!” he cried, “you shall not escape me. Clare, I will avenge you, or die in the attempt!”

The next instant their swords clashed. For a moment nothing was to be heard but the hard breathing of the combatants and the clash of their weapons, nothing to be seen but the two dark figures and the bright flashing of their swords. At first the stranger seemed to gain the advantage, for slowly and steadily he drove his opponent backwards towards the wall. At length he saw what he considered a favourable opportunity, and putting his foot forward, he made a desperate lunge. He stumbled over the prostrate body of Clare, and fell

heavily to the ground. He attempted to rise, but ere he could do so the Baron, with an exclamation of triumph, pierced his throat. The blood gushed forth in a ruddy torrent, and with a hollow groan, the stranger sank backwards never to rise again. A raging madness appeared to have seized upon the assassin, a sanguinary thirst possessed him, a mist of blood floated before him. Thrice did he plunge his blade into the now inanimate form. His hands were reeking with the blood, his clothes were smirched with gore, and the thirsty ground eagerly drank up the crimson streams that flowed around in all directions. At length he seemed to recover his senses. He passed his hand across his heated brow, the hand was moist and wet. He started and looked at it with horror. The heavy, red drops coursing down the fingers, fell to the ground, leaving a scarlet track behind. He cast his eyes to the

earth—and he saw before him two pale, breathless corpses lying in a bloody pool.

The moon cast a subdued but steady light on the white, ghastly countenances, imparting to them a horrible, livid hue. Clare's eyes, those eyes once so animated and beautiful, were fixed in a stony stare on the clear blue sky, the long raven tresses were matted with gore, the white dress served only to show more clearly to the assassin the ensanguined tide wherewith it was stained.

It was torn and rent where it had been pierced by the dagger, and here the blood still welled from the gaping wounds.

It was some moments before the wretched man awoke to a full consciousness of the awful crime of which he had been guilty. When at length he did so he was seized with a remorse no less intense, no less appalling than had been his former passion.

He staggered back against the wall for support, his lips were parted, his breathing slow and deep, his eyes fixed themselves in a kind of fascination on those of his victim. He remained there for some time. Not a sound disturbed the awful reverie into which he had fallen.

The stars seemed gazing down from the azure vault, and regarding in mournful silence the tragedy just enacted beneath them ; the wind, as it sighed through the branches of the trees in the distant wood, appeared to wail over the fate of the departed, and the gloomy, blackened walls of the ancient keep frowned as if in anger on the murderer. The latter, by a violent effort, shook off his temporary stupor, and becoming conscious of the necessity of taking some measures, immediately cast about him for the best method of concealing the bodies. At first he thought of burying them in the dried-up moat, or in the fields below ; but



he could not entertain the thought of having the horrid objects so near, silently reproaching him each time he chanced to glance towards where they lay; then also he might be seen from the windows if any one happened to be gazing from them. After some time he remembered the existence of a small but very deep pond in the heart of a wood, distant about a mile and a half from the Castle walls. In the depths of this pool he determined to hide the evidence of his guilt. His motions were now characterised by a feverish impatience, which replaced the former prostration which had paralysed his actions. In spite of the invincible repugnance with which the action inspired him, he advanced towards the body of Clare and raised it in his arms. He cast a look towards the windows, but not a light was visible at any one of them, and rejoicing that he had been hitherto unobserved, he sprang down the earthen

embankment, and climbing up the other side, soon found himself standing beyond the moat. Scarcely pausing to take breath, he commenced the descent of the hill. He flew like the wind ; detection was in the one scale, escape in the other. The body, like a leaden weight, hung in his arms. It recalled to his mind the evening when he had assisted Clare to escape from the Abbey at Monza. Then she lay in his arms insensible indeed, but living, breathing—now her limbs were stiff and cold in death. A groan—a groan terrible in its significance—burst from the unhappy wretch. In that groan were revealed the terrible tortures of a conscience which stung and goaded him incessantly with envenomed darts. How bitterly, but now, alas ! how fruitlessly, did he repent that first crime by which he had tempted Clare to quit the tranquillity of the convent, to become his wife—the wife of her assassin !

With what grim distinctness did memory conjure up every circumstance in the chain of events, from the first moment when he saw Clare in the beautiful little chapel at Monza, to the enaction of the hideous drama on the Castle terrace! But it was now too late—the deed was accomplished—repentance or punishment—between these two his choice lay.

With accelerated speed he rushed through the fields, springing across hedges, and over obstacles, as if striving to outrun the course of his own thoughts.

At length he entered the wood, still carrying his hideous burden. He was now compelled to moderate his pace. As he advanced slowly through the trees, which throwing their dark shadows athwart the grass, seemed to frown on the midnight disturber of their repose, he started at every sigh of the wind as it rustled through the foliage, and looked

nervously back, as though expecting to see an avenger on his track. Thus he advanced for about half-an-hour. At length, to his infinite relief, he caught a glimpse of the pond through the intervening boughs; a moment more, and he stood on the brink.

The waters were calm and undisturbed. The banks were shadowed by the willows which bent their long plume-like branches over the side, appearing, when the breeze slightly agitated them, like mourners weeping over the departed.

The calm, clear moon reflected in the placid bosom of the water, the fleecy clouds, the trees dark and silent, enhanced the solemn tranquillity of the scene.

Even the murderer's soul was for an instant touched by its placid beauty; but recalled to a sense of the risk incurred by delay, he immediately set about the accomplishment of the task which had brought him into the wood. He laid down the body at

the water's edge, and walked some distance off to collect stones wherewith to sink it.

He glanced uneasily from time to time towards the corpse, as though fearing to see some person issue from the shade and bear off the evidence of his guilt. At length, having got together a sufficient quantity of stones to suit his purpose, he returned and placed them in the cloak, which latter he fastened to the body. All was now prepared. He lifted the murdered woman in his arms, and held her suspended over the water. He glanced around as though he suspected that he was observed by some watcher hidden amongst the trees. Then, exerting all his strength, he cast his victim into the very centre of the pool.

There was a gurgling sound as the weight sunk down, the bubbles floated on the surface for a moment, the eddies played around in ever-widening circles; then the waters

resumed their usual calm appearance, and all was still, quiet, and at peace—yes, all but the assassin's heart. Philibert lingered a moment by the pool to satisfy himself that the hideous object was really gone; then he bent his steps towards the Castle. There lay the other body, stiff and rigid in the cold moonlight that streamed down on the fatal terrace. As he bent over the corpse the villain recognised in the pale and distorted features, the lineaments of the countenance of Casimir, Count of Manfredonia, the brother of Clare. When the horror caused by this discovery had subsided, he took the body on his shoulders, and bent his way again towards the wood, whilst at every step the blood welled forth over his face and garments. Another hideous journey with the dead—another heavy plunge—a hasty return—and all was over.

On arriving at the Castle he easily

regained his chamber, cleansed his face and hands from all traces of the midnight crime, whilst he congratulated himself that his temporary absence had not been observed.

Truly he had not been watched by mortal eye, but there was One who saw all, and who was preparing a terrible retribution for the murderer. The Baron threw himself on his couch, and tried to sleep, but slumber brought not repose.

For two hours he tossed restlessly, haunted by the thought of his crime, which his dreams distorted and exaggerated into a thousand horrible shapes. At length he awoke with a convulsive start, and unable to endure the idea of a recurrence of the visions which had tormented him, he rose, dressed himself, and during the remainder of the night paced up and down his room.

At daybreak he descended into the

Castle-yard, ordered the groom to saddle a horse, then, laying an injunction on the man that no one should follow him, he rode out of the Castle.

All day he galloped forward with scarcely slackened speed. He could not endure to think of the occurrence of the preceding night, and sought, but in vain, to distract his thoughts. Towards evening the walls of Stuttgart appeared rising in the distance. This sight caused the Baron still further to augment his pace, and within the next hour he rode slowly under the frowning archway, and found himself in the narrow streets of the old capital of Wurtemberg.

He passed along the crowded thoroughfares, bounded on either side by quaint houses, painted in black and white, and roofed with red tiles, till he came to a large inn, in front of which stood a sign-board exhibiting a rude representation of a boar.



Here he alighted, gave his steed in charge to the ostler, and, entering the house, ordered some refreshment to be carried to his room ; and, having partaken sparingly, he went out, travel-stained and weary as he was, and inquired for the house of Madame Rautzan.

After some difficulty he discovered it in a secluded but respectable part of the city, and walking up to the door, rang the bell loudly. In answer to his summons a servant, attired in a black velvet doublet and trunk hose, made his appearance.

In response to the query as to whether he could then see Madame Rautzan, the man looked wonderingly, almost contemptuously at his questioner, whose garments, bearing evident tokens of his journey, did not prepossess him in his favour. At length he demanded, in a tone the reverse of civil, the name he should give his mistress. At the title of "the Baron of Eppenfeld" his

manner instantaneously altered, and from insolent and supercilious he became obsequious and fawning. Such is the power of a name!

Philibert followed the servant up the stairs, and in a few moments was introduced into the *boudoir*, where madame received him. The room was small, but furnished with some degree of luxury and a great deal of taste. In a comfortable velvet arm-chair sat the lady herself. She was attired in black, but with great elegance and simplicity. She rose as her lover entered, but the strange disorder of his attire, the abruptness of his manner, his pale face and compressed lips, checked the welcome that rose to her tongue. Dropping back into the chair with an emotion somewhat akin to fear, she waited till he should speak.

He advanced towards her, and stopping at the small table on which rested her arm,

he put his hand into the breast of his doublet, and drew forth a small poniard which he flung down without a word.

Madame Rautzan shuddered, for dark stains, evidently of blood, marked the steel. She looked up, and with a glance interrogated the Baron.

A pause of some moments ensued, till Philibert, raising his head, fixed his glaring eyes upon her, and in a low, hollow, yet perfectly audible tone, exclaimed: "It is done; the blood that marks that dagger is the blood of Clare Sforza."

In spite of the fact that she it was who had urged him to the commission of the odious deed, the lady uttered a cry of horror, and moved her chair back from the table on which the loathsome object lay.

"Yes," said the Baron with a cuttingsneer, "you may well shrink from it. It had never been thus but for you. But," he added in a firmer tone, "it is done now, and there is no

use in regretting the inevitable. I come to claim your hand as the price of the deed to which you so cunningly instigated me. Let us forget that there is a God, and let us be happy."

Insatiate as was the desire of this woman for wealth, boundless as was her craving for power and rank, the circumstances were of so revolting a nature, that for an instant even *she* hesitated to reply. Observing this, Philibert demanded, in a tone of suppressed fury, "whether she meant to recede from her engagement?" at the same time he advanced menacingly towards her and laid his hand on the dagger.

Adelaide Rautzan shuddered, but recovered her self-possession sufficiently to say, in a low voice :

"I am ready, Philibert ; from this day I regard myself as your wife."

"Say rather as Baroness," he replied, with acrimony.

“It was not the man that you loved, but the noble, the owner of the broad domains of Eppenfeld.”

She did not choose to notice the sarcastic allusion contained in his expression, but remained without speaking.

The Baron paced the room for several moments, seemingly in a state of great agitation. He suddenly stopped in front of the lady's chair.

“We leave Stuttgart to-morrow,” he said, in hasty, dry accents.

“To-morrow! so soon?” repeated Madame Rautzan.

“And,” pursued the Baron, without seeming to notice this interruption, “we must be at the Castle in three days. I will have all prepared for the marriage. Get everything ready to start at nine to-morrow. And now, farewell.”

So saying he bowed, and left the house.

It may be conjectured from the foregoing

scene that a reaction of feeling was taking place in the heart of the Baron. Remorse, that fatal canker-worm, was, in spite of his wild, almost frantic efforts to turn his thoughts into another channel, eating into his breast. Already the regard he had felt for Madame Rautzan was being absorbed by a feeling of aversion as toward the cause of the fatal, the irremediable act of which he had been guilty. He strove hard to hope that time would soften or banish the remembrance of the crime, and that the union which he contemplated would prove a happy one; whether he was or was not deceived, the sequel will show.

Next morning, punctual to his engagement, he called at the house, where he found Madame Rautzan.

Half an hour afterwards the party rode beneath the archway over the principal entrance of the city, and found themselves in the open country.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE WARNING.

SOME days after, the weary cavalcade rode across the moat of the Castle. Almost the first intelligence which the Baron received was that of the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the Baroness, who had not been seen by any one at Eppenfeld for several days previously. The guilty wretch shuddered as he listened; *he* knew only too certainly what had occurred to prevent her appearance. It was, however, necessary to feign complete ignorance, and he pretended the utmost astonishment and alarm. Hurriedly turning to the lady, who took her cue from him, he apologised for his

unavoidable absence, and ordering the castellan to see everything prepared in her apartments, he went off to order a careful search for traces of the missing Baroness, who he said there was no doubt would soon be discovered. Messengers left the Castle in quick succession, and rode full speed across the country in all directions to their several destinations, in quest of intelligence.

Philibert trembled as he gave his commands, lest by some mischance the truth might be discovered. When he was alone he paced quickly up and down the hall, weighing carefully every chance, and each probability for or against himself. At one moment he feared that the stones might have become detached, and that the corpse would be found floating on the surface of the pool, at another he trembled lest traces of blood should be visible on the scene of the crime. His steps were quick and feverish, his breathing hard, drops of per-



spiration rolled down his forehead, his knees bent under him, as the possibility of a disclosure again occurred to his mind. At length he sank down on a bench, and remained still for an instant. 'Twas but for an instant. The phantoms of his brain, which, whilst he was in motion, had appeared as though pursuing their victim, now seemed standing about him, mocking his agonies, and deriding his terrors. He gazed wildly round, as though seeking for some material being on whom to avenge himself, but no one appeared, and still those conjurations of his fancy mocked and jeered him as he sat there incapable of rising.

He could endure it no longer. With a choking cry he sprang to his feet, and recommenced his walk. At that moment the door opened, and the seneschal entered. He gazed for an instant at the young man as he hastily stalked down the chamber,

muttering imprecations. Surprise for a moment kept him silent, but at length, charitably attributing the behaviour of Philibert to grief at the mysterious disappearance of his wife, he ventured respectfully to accost him. For several moments the excited man, entirely occupied with his own thoughts, neither perceived his entrance into the room nor heard his voice.

Upon the reiteration of the words of the seneschal he started, stood still, and putting his hand on the hilt of his sword, as though he expected to see an enemy, he looked round in every direction, till his eyes fell on the person of the official. He demanded his business in a very abrupt, and by no means gentle tone.

He learned that the men sent out to search had returned without finding any clue. Without replying to this, Philibert motioned his follower to quit the room, and resumed his solitary peregrinations ; but

presently, as though wishing to escape from the torture of his own thoughts, he wandered to the battlements. Thence he proceeded to the rooms occupied by Madame Rautzan. He knocked at the door of her sitting-room, and on entering found her reclining on a sofa near the fire. She was pale, haggard, and careworn, but so absorbed was the Baron in his schemes for diverting all suspicion from his own conduct, that he did not even perceive these circumstances. Bolting the door securely, so as to obviate all chances of interruption, Philibert strode up to the fireplace, where the large timber-logs blazed with a roaring noise.

He then gave her a few hints relative to the manner in which she was to act whilst the inquiries for the missing lady were proceeding. She was to appear greatly concerned, to try to console the Baron, and to hold out hopes to him before the vassals

and retainers, and above all, she was to seem entirely ignorant of the causes of the disappearance of the Baroness.

Up to a late hour the lord of Eppenfeld remained in the Castle-hall, apparently waiting for some favourable intelligence. But though each hour an emissary came riding into the courtyard, he brought no tidings; not a trace of Lady Clare had as yet been found.

As yet—Philibert trembled at the words—as yet nothing had been found; what if something should be at last? Improbable, nay, absurd as the notion would appear, yet to such a pitch had the mind of the assassin been wrought by excitement and anxiety, that he imagined each of his messengers brought news of the fearful discovery.

It was deep night before the wretched man thought of repose. All was now quiet and dark within the Castle.

The logs smouldered and glowed on the hearth, the wind whistled without the walls, and sighed mournfully through the dark passages of the ancient edifice. The lamp which stood on the table threw a gloomy light around, involving the remainder of the vast hall in still greater darkness. Ever and anon the heavy oaken window-frames shook violently to the passing blast, and the clattering noise, reverberating afar, added to the sepulchral associations of the scene, and served only to make the profound, the terrible silence, still more impressive. At a table, his head resting on his hands, sat the Baron. He thought, and oh! of what nature were his thoughts? Why was his face so ghastly pale, why throbbed his temples so wildly? why, as he lifted his livid countenance, why did it wear a look so weird, so frightfully composed? Who can tell the tortures, the mental agony he endured? Into that space of two hours was


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concentrated more than the suffering of a lifetime, and as he slowly rose and took the lamp, his quivering hand, his hesitating step, indicated rather the feebleness of a worn old man, than the strength and vigour of youth.

He stopped at every noise, he looked round in terror each time a door clapped in the distance, or a window creaked and strained in the storm. At length he reached the door. 'A strange hesitation, a feeling hitherto unknown, came over him. He feared almost to touch the handle. With an angry exclamation at his own cowardice, he resolutely seized it, and flung open the door. A gust of wind violently struck, and for a moment staggered him. Without pausing, however, he plunged resolutely into the deserted corridor, and presently afterwards, as he traversed its gloomy length, the door of the hall slammed violently behind. With acce-

lerated speed he passed along, holding the light above his head in such a manner as to enable him to see his way more distinctly. At length he reached another entrance, a large oaken door, carved richly, and bound with brass. Again he paused, and for a longer time than before. This led into the chapel. The Baron, in the disordered state of his mind, had forgotten this circumstance, or otherwise he might have taken another route to reach his chamber, for the conscience-stricken murderer revolted at the idea of entering alone the temple of God; but there was no help for it, and he would not turn back or show any evidence of fear.

He pushed open the door, and found himself immediately within the sacred precincts. The interior of the church was wrapped in total darkness, except where a small silver lamp, suspended from the groined and vaulted ceiling, and burning




directly before the high altar, created an oasis of light in this very wilderness of gloom. The tall white pillars supporting the roof, and placed at regular intervals, resembled gigantic phantoms, and the red light from the lamp, as it fell on them, increased the resemblance. Scattered around were the marble sepulchres within which reposed the ashes of the successive generations of the line of Eppenfeld. There they lay, in all the solemn grandeur of death. A stray shaft of moonlight would occasionally force its way through the stained glass windows, and falling obliquely on the monuments, reveal the rudely-carved figures of the knight in his mail, the lady in the quaint, yet richly-adorned garb of the olden time, their hands in an attitude of prayer, or crossed upon their breasts. Never more would the cavaliers hear the ringing shout of armies as they joined in battle, never again would they quaff the



mead, or the foaming Rhenish, from goblets of gold, nor would the Castle-hall re-echo the sounds of their mirth and wassail. Father, and son, brother, sister, and wife, slept there the sleep that knows no waking. And there in their midst, in the dead silence of midnight, stood the last of that long and unsullied race, the last Baron of Eppenfeld—a murderer.

He looked round with a kind of horror, and as his wandering eyes fell on the tombs, he almost imagined that the stern features of the old warriors perceptibly darkened, and that a heavy frown of anger and menace settled on each stony face, as it averted its gaze from the form of its degenerate descendant. So strongly was the Baron impressed with this idea, that he stood for a moment motionless, as his eyes wandered from tomb to tomb. He feared to see the figures open their marble lips and invoke a malediction on his head. But no—all were



silent, and save the loud whistling of the blast, as gust after gust struck the walls of the ancient pile, not a sound broke the stillness. Contemning the idle fears which had for an instant stopped him, Philibert began to advance down the dark aisle of the church. Once or twice he stopped, almost persuaded that a voice pronounced his name; but not a sound broke upon the ear, save the hollow reverberation of his own steps as they died away in the distant parts of the chapel.

He had already more than half crossed the church, when suddenly he remained chained to the spot, petrified with terror and amazement. His eyes almost started from his head, his jaw fell, the lantern nearly slipped from his stiffened fingers. His breathing suspended, he stood fixed the very impersonation of horror. Just twenty yards in front, where the light fell faint, glimmering, and uncertain, appeared

the shadowy outline of a woman's figure, clothed in white, but wearing a velvet cloak, clasped at the throat with a jewelled ornament. The face was pale—frightfully pale; it seemed as though death had already set there his seal. Long black tresses hung in disorder over the shoulders, and blood appeared on the snowy robes. The guilty wretch strove to avert his countenance; but no—he could not do it; a superhuman force compelled him to behold the terrific sight. He could not tell how it came there, or when he saw it first; no footfall announced its approach, but there it was before him. The phantom, for such he doubted not it was, approached. Not a sound, not even the rustle of the dress, was audible.

Philibert again essayed to fly, but he was unable to move a step, and half maddened with apprehension, he remained chained to the spot.

At that instant a peal of thunder shook the whole fabric, and a flash of lightning illuminated the aisle with dazzling brilliancy. By its livid light the Baron saw the features of the apparition with frightful distinctness. He shuddered as he recognised the well-known lineaments of Clare Sforza. The kind devoted expression was gone, and replaced by a look of menace and of anger. Her eyes flashed with indignation, and as she raised her arm and pointed to the murderer, as if calling on Heaven to bear witness to her wrongs, the trembling coward shrank back in extremity of fear. Again the thunder rolled overhead, again the lightning flashed through the chapel, and again Philibert saw the corpse-like face become animated with the angry passions which he had excited in the breast of his wife. With her arm outstretched, as though uttering a malediction, her long blood-stained garments floating around her, she seemed the spirit of the

scene, the sibyl by whose agency the howling tempest without had been evoked for the purpose of aiding in her unhallowed projects. She spoke, and every word thrilled like a stab in the heart of her solitary auditor. Her voice was low, yet clear ; distinct and equal, yet deep and hollow.

"Philibert of Eppenfeld !" she uttered these words, and paused, as if awaiting a reply.

He strove to answer, but his tongue refused to speak, and his dry parched lips remained closed.

"Philibert of Eppenfeld !" again the voice sounded through the deserted fane, as though the spirits of his ancestors interred around, were, from their silent tombs, calling on their descendant, the last of their race, and summoning him to answer to an avenging spirit.

After several futile attempts Philibert, with a convulsive effort, muttered in a

low tone: "Here—what would you with me?"

The spectre again broke the silence; she spoke, it seemed, with less of anger than before, but there was a low, deeply solemn melancholy in her tones, which amazed and terrified in a manner that neither threat nor menace could have succeeded in effecting.

"Repent, repent," she said, "for soon time shall be no more, and the hour approaches when neither prayers nor penance can save thee."

"What meanest thou?" he gasped, in a low, hurried, almost inaudible tone.

The spectre, without appearing to notice his words, proceeded:

"I come to warn thee of thy doom. If by this night three months hence thy heart is not softened within thee, and thy crime remains unatoned, thou art for ever lost. Leave thy Castle, abdicate thy rank, cast

from thee this woman for whom thou hast bartered thy soul, and by a life of austerity expiate thy offences, for in no other manner can my spirit be appeased. Repent thy crime ere the olive branch of mercy be replaced by the keen edge of the sword of justice. Thou shalt see me again—it depends upon thyself whether, as angel of mercy or messenger of doom.

As the last words were uttered the phantom vanished, and ere they died away Philibert found himself alone—alone in the ancient church. He gazed around him in terror, pressed his hands to his throbbing temples, and endeavoured to persuade himself that what he had witnessed was some horrid vision conjured up by his dis-tempered imagination—some hideous dream that had inflamed his fancy; but his attempts were in vain, and with a sickening sense of fear and apprehension, he was compelled to acknowledge its awful reality.

He looked about in abject terror, and as the wind whistled without, now rising and now sinking to a low hollow moan, he shuddered as though he heard mysterious voices reproaching him with his guilt, and threatening him with a terrible retribution. Thus for several moments stood the unhappy man, quivering in every limb, moaning to himself at each blast of the storm, and starting at each flash which cast its livid light across the pavement. His knees knocked under him, he gasped for breath, and sank down in a swoon. When he recovered his senses all signs of the tempest had disappeared; the sky was clear, and blue as sapphire; the sun shone through the stained glass of the windows, and fell in mellow tints on the marbled floor; the clouds, which a few hours before had dashed against one another like ships in mortal combat, illuminating the firmament with the fierce brilliancy of their



artillery, and the echoes of whose cannon had made the base of the strongest buildings tremble, now floated, white and fleecy, through the morning air, borne along by gentle breezes, the placid representatives of the storm of the preceding night.

As the full sense of what had occurred flashed across his brain, the Baron staggered to his feet, and looking apprehensively on every side, made haste to quit the ill-omened spot, and leave the chapel.

CHAPTER XIII.

“In vain Lord William sought the feast,  
In vain he quaffed the bowl,  
And strove in noisy mirth to drown  
The anguish of his soul.”

SOUTHEY.

“When he sat down to the royal fare,  
Bishop Bruno was the saddest man there ;  
But when the maskers enter’d the hall  
He was the merriest man of all.

“Then from out the maskers’ crowd  
There went a voice hollow and loud :  
‘You have passed the day, Bishop Bruno, with glee,  
But you must pass the night with me !’

“His cheek grows pale, and his eye-balls glare,  
And stiff round his tonsure rises his hair ;  
With that there came one from the masker’s band  
And he took the Bishop by the hand.

“The bony hand suspended his breath,  
His marrow grew cold at the touch of Death ;  
On saints in vain he attempted to call—  
Bishop Bruno fell dead in the palace hall.”

*Ibid.*

THREE months had passed away, so slowly, and yet with such rapidity, as it seemed to Philibert. Since the fatal night in the chapel his appearance had undergone a strange, an almost appalling change. His black hair was thickly sprinkled with grey, his figure had become bent and stooping, his features were wan and haggard, and his deep sunken eye glittered with a wild and unnatural fire. Sleep forsook his couch, or, when it came, his slumbers were made horrible by evil dreams more terrific than his waking thoughts. Ofttimes he awoke with a loud, shrill, piercing cry, and as an alarmed attendant would rush in, he would discover his master sitting up in bed, one hand clutching convulsively at the clothes, his distended eyes fixed on vacancy, his mouth working nervously and emitting broken syllables, while the large, heavy, cold beads of sweat coursed slowly down his convulsed and agonised countenance.

When he was aroused from this species of trance, the Baron invariably drove the man away with furious imprecations, and ultimately, in order to secure himself from interruption, and screen himself from the eyes of his attendants, he securely barred the door on retiring to his couch. To add to his torment, he had conceived a violent hatred of the new Baroness (to whom he had been united for some time), and whom he looked upon with some justice, as the primary cause of the bloody deed which had poisoned his whole existence. She, on her part, began to feel an aversion for a man from whom she received nothing but neglect, and who never opened his lips to address her, unless to utter some ironical scoff or reproach.

She, accordingly, spent the greater part of her time at a small château in a distant part of Wurtemberg, living in almost total seclusion. Thus, punishment had already fallen on this wretched pair, exemplifying

the maxim that there is "no peace for the wicked." The fruit which looked so beautiful and so fair to the eye proved but an apple of Sodom, filled with dust, and the crime which had promised such happiness but a source of constant fear, suspicion, and anxiety. To remorse was added the reflection that while they had gained nothing but misery, they had entailed upon themselves the future consequences of a great crime.

When he awoke from his ill-boding dreams, the Baron would dress, and seating himself in a chair, with a lighted lamp beside him, await the approach of morning. In order to drown the remorse which gnawed his heart, and to drive away the terror which beset him, he now plunged into the wildest dissipations. He drank habitually and deeply, and the first rays of the sun pouring through the windows of the Castle hall frequently discovered the revel-

lers lying about the room, the table flooded with wine, while the floor was strewn with goblets and other drinking vessels. But all was to no purpose.

In the midst of the wildest revel his companions were astounded to see him rise and shrink from the table, his starting eyeballs glaring at some portion of the room where they could discover nothing but the blank walls.

Dark, sinister rumours were afloat respecting the disappearance of the late Baroness. Conjectures were hazarded, and many efforts were made to pierce the veil of mystery that shrouded her fate. That some foul deed had been committed few could doubt; the Baron's hasty marriage, and his recent extraordinary conduct, plainly showed that his knowledge of the affair was greater than he chose to confess; but, from lack of evidence, no steps to bring about his arrest could be hazarded, and

the authorities were fain to let the problem remain in its present obscure condition, and await the further development of the mystery. Reports of the strange behaviour of Philibert, of his nightly visions and dreams, were circulated by the inmates of the Castle ; and when he stirred abroad, which was but seldom, people fled on his approach, as they would have fled that of some mortal pestilence or of some wild beast.

Time went slowly forward, and the dreaded day approached. At length it came. During the whole of the preceding week the Baron had been in an agony of terror. At one time he thought of, repentance, but his pride revolted at the idea, for he could not bring himself to surrender his Castle, his domains, and his titular honours ; and to exchange his power and his riches for the hard, obscure, austere life of a hermit, for the dull, unbroken soli-

tude of a cell. Solitude! his whole soul revolted at the idea. Solitude to him, covered with guilt, devoured by remorse! he felt it would be worse than death, more terrible than the tomb; and yet he shuddered each time that the heavy toll of the bell proclaimed that an hour had passed, that one of the barriers between himself and the day named by the phantom as the time of his punishment, had been removed.

More than once he had thought of leaving the country, but this his declining state of health would not permit.

The day arrived. All through the morning the Baron was observed to be extremely restless and agitated, but no one ventured to question him. In the evening a magnificent banquet was served up in the great hall; for the lord of Eppenfeld, in order to divert his mind from resting on gloomy ideas, had resolved to drown



his cares in the flowing bowl. Eight o'clock struck on the Castle clock, and the guests soon after began to arrive. By nine all were assembled, and proceeded to the hall.

The Baron seated himself in the large oaken chair at the head of the table, in exactly the same place where he had sat years before on the day of his majority. How changed he now appeared !

On that joyful occasion he was young and handsome, in the pride of manly strength and beauty ; now he was a pale, trembling, haggard man, prematurely aged, broken down with suffering and excess. Indeed, his appearance excited the wonder of his dissolute companions, who noticed the cadaverous aspect of his features, and his bent, attenuated figure.

The banquet commenced. Large smoking joints, and other viands were brought in by the richly-clad attendants, and ceremo-

niously placed upon the table. For an hour the meal proceeded in almost total silence, for the sombre appearance of their host had the effect of casting a general gloom over the guests. The dishes were at length removed, and large silver flagons of Rhenish and Hungarian wines, placed upon the table. The goblets were repeatedly filled, emptied, and replenished, and the sense of oppression caused by the Baron's appearance, insensibly wore away under the genial influence of the wine. The chilling reserve of Philibert broke down, and soon he was the merriest man in the room, exchanging a fire of jest and retort with his neighbours, and exhibiting a general hilarity to which he had long been a stranger. Time sped on, and, as the minutes passed, the influence of the generous vine-juice became visible in the flushed faces and sparkling eyes of the guests. Jollity soon passed into riot and intoxication, and in the course

of an hour the hall was a scene of confusion and uproar. Philibert drank deeply and incessantly. Suddenly, with slow and solemn toll, the Castle clock struck eleven. The sound sobered the Baron, and half-starting from his chair, he looked around in dismay. The echoes of the last stroke slowly died away, and for a moment the horrid consciousness that but one hour remained before midnight, flashed across his mind. He rose from his seat with the intention of quitting the scene, but the revellers perceived his intention, and detained him.

The impression soon passed away, and the host was again the soul of the feast, the most madly-excited man there. A quarter-past eleven—half-past—a quarter to twelve struck, one after another. He heard them not, he heeded them not. Ten minutes—five minutes to twelve.

At length the clock tolled the hour of

midnight. The first stroke recalled the Baron to himself, and he visibly shuddered. As the last rung clear and distinct upon the night air he rose to his feet. His face was pale, his eyes glared, his figure was stiff, erect, and motionless; his countenance was bathed in the sweat that flowed from every pore, his hair stood on end with horror. Suddenly he started, as though touched by some electrical force, and a wild scream of terror burst from his lips.

“Keep off!—keep off!” he cried, waving his hands as though motioning back some invisible object; then turning to the gentlemen at table, who were regarding him with wonder not unmixed with fear: “Do you not see her in her long white blood-stained robe, her waving tresses dripping with water? She points to me! she advances! For God’s sake, keep her off! why do you not keep her off? Oh,

mercy! she touches me with her cold, bony, ice-like fingers! Mercy!—mercy!”

And again he burst into a wild and horrible scream. At the same instant the silver shield fell with a loud clang. Suddenly they beheld him lifted from the ground by some invisible force. He shrieked and howled in the most awful manner, his struggles were violent, but vain. He was borne upwards rapidly, and when he approached the ceiling he was hurled with great force on the floor below, and the marble was stained with his blood. His starting eyes rolled in their orbits, a bloody foam settled upon his distorted lips, a convulsive shudder passed through his frame, and, with a groan, he expired. A mangled, shapeless mass, was all that remained of the Lord of Eppenfeld.

Petrified with horror, the roysterers sat speechless and motionless. Nothing could

be heard but the wild howl of the storm, as it raged round the Castle, and the roll of the thunder. Suddenly the lights went out, and the hall was wrapped in complete darkness. The thunder pealed overhead; a bolt shot from the sky struck the building, and the roof fell in with a terrific crash, burying the guests in the ruins. The flames caught a neighbouring tower, and thus spread over the whole building. They swayed around the ancient walls like sails inflated by the wind, and coiled like serpents round the hoary towers which had so long defied the hand of time. The mighty conflagration was visible for miles and miles around, diffusing a brilliant light, while the sky overhead was red and lurid from the reflection of the blazing pile.

Some attempts were made to save the Castle, but they were utterly futile, and were presently abandoned. The flames roared with a noise like the sea. All night

long Eppenfeld burned like a gigantic beacon-fire ; but about six in the morning the massive walls, which had so often withstood the brunt of war, and the rage of the elements, fell in with a crash, and the fire soon burnt out, though the embers glowed for several days afterwards. Nought but a heap of ruins remained to mark the once stately home of the Eppenfelts.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"The lady was buried in Salem's bless'd bound,  
The Count he was left to the vulture and hound;  
Her soul to high mercy Our Lady did bring,  
His went on the blast to the dread Fire King."

SIR W. SCOTT.

BUT little more remains to be told. Of the Baron's guests on that fatal night one alone escaped. He took horse, and, riding hard by day and night, arrived at the Baroness's château, and, demanding to see Madame Rautzan, was, after a brief delay, ushered into her presence. He remained with her for an hour, and on his departure the servant who saw him out noticed that his mistress looked remarkably agitated. Indeed, so horrified was the unhappy woman



at the news thus brought her, that she resolved to quit for ever the scene of her crimes. On the following night she left her house, and all attempts to discover her retreat resulted in failure. Many years afterwards, in the north of Hungary, in a convent belonging to one of the most austere orders, Sister Adalberta, a nun who for a long time had lived amongst them, but of whose previous history nothing was known, died suddenly. For twenty years had she led a life of the most severe and mortified character. Her penances were rigorous, her prayers and fasts frequent. She appeared to be expiating some great though hidden crime. On her deathbed she bequeathed a paper to the Abbess, desiring that it should not be opened until after her burial. When the seal was broken the contents were discovered to be the confessions of a lady once known and sought after in the world.

The document bore the signature of

Adelaide, Baroness of Eppenfeld, and contained a full account of the events preceding and following the assassination of Clare. About the same time, the pool into which Philibert had cast the bodies of his wife and brother-in-law, was completely dried up. Deeply imbedded in weeds and mud, were found two human skeletons. Certain articles of jewellery caused the recognition of one by an old inhabitant of the village who had formerly lived in the Castle, and the remains of the unhappy Italian were interred in consecrated ground. The Marquis Sforza learnt the tidings of his daughter's disappearance from the Count of Riesenbourg, who stopped at his palace on his way to Rome.

This painful intelligence, added to grief at the mysterious disappearance of his son, accelerated the work of age and disease, and two years after the destruction of Eppenfeld, the old Marquis died.

The gentleman who had escaped from the Castle on the night of Philibert's death, resolved to atone, by the austerity of his later years, for the dissolute excesses of youth. He had a terrible example before his eyes, and he resolved to profit by it. He resigned his property to his heir, and spent the remainder of his days in a Carthusian monastery.

No trace of the Baron was ever found, although a diligent search was instituted.

To this day his name is mentioned by the peasants with a mixture of hatred and superstitious fear.

The trembling guide points out to the traveller the ruins of the ancient, gloomy-looking keep, and pours into his eager ear the story of Philibert and of the unhappy Clare. The benighted wayfarer or wandering mendicant makes a wide circuit in order to avoid the place, and is content to remain all night in the open air rather than seek

shelter beneath the desolate walls of the Castle.

Philibert left no heirs ; he was the last of his race ; his vast possessions passed into other hands, and to-day not a scion remains to represent the once powerful and opulent line of the Barons of Eppenfeld.

“Such,” said the host, “is the story of the old Castle which you saw on your way hither.”

## THE MOOR'S LAST SIGH.

On the morning of the 2nd Jan., 1492, Granada having surrendered to Ferdinand and Isabella, Mahmoud Abdallah, known as Boabdil el Chico, the last king, attended by a few followers, rode out of the Alhambra by a gate henceforth closed up, and passing through the street descended into the Vega, where was drawn up the Spanish army. Boabdil exchanged a few words with his conqueror, and then rode away, whilst Ferdinand continued his march on the city. The Moor is said to have halted for a moment in a pass whence he took a last view of his fallen capital and the far-famed palace of the Alhambra, and was affected even to tears. His mother Ayaxa, regarding him sternly, exclaimed, "Yes, weep like a woman for what you could not defend like a man." This spot is still known as "El ultimo suspiro del Moro" ("The last sigh of the Moor").

THE golden, glitt'ring sunbeams fall

In show'rs of sparkling light,

And gleam upon the marble wall,

All fair and dazzling white.

They pierce the richly-stained glass,  
They shine on sculpture rare,  
And o'er the marbled pavement pass,  
Serene and smiling fair.

But oh ! no sound of joy is heard  
Within those royal walls,  
Nor laughter gay, nor joyous word—  
No warrior's footstep falls.

The show'rs from fountains rise on high,  
And downward flashing pour—  
Alas, alas ! the Moslem's eye  
Must trace their course no more.

The hangings, rich in silk and gold,  
Along the walls droop down,  
But silence, cheerless, chill, and cold,  
Reigns here, whence mirth has flown.

From out the harem's latticed bound  
Is heard no guzla's twang,  
No silv'ry voices sweetly sound,  
Rings loud no cymbal's clang.

The gardens rich and splendid gleam  
     With flow'rs of ev'ry hue,  
 And glistening 'neath each sunny beam  
     Is seen the gem-like dew.

The palm stands lone and sad and still,  
     And as the breeze sweeps by,  
 The cypress branches seem to thrill  
     With deep funereal sigh.

Along the dark secluded ways  
     No footstep echoes now,  
 No flashing jewels brightly blaze  
     Upon a turban'd brow.

The rushing rills pursue their course  
     With melancholy moan,  
 The waves lament in murmurs hoarse  
     Granada's glories flown.

The plashing fountains seem to weep  
     The Moorish Empire's fall,  
 The streamlets sigh as past they sweep  
     Th' Alhambra's 'battled wall.

No more above each lofty tow'r  
The em'rald standard waves,  
For past for e'er 's the prophet's pow'r;  
His sons the foe enslaves.

Upon the walls in serried line  
No mail-clad forms are seen,  
No polished helms, no lances shine  
With bright, resplendent sheen.

A sullen still, as of the tomb,  
Those royal halls o'erhung;  
An air of deep funereal gloom  
To all their splendour clung.

And now, behold, yon heavy gate  
Back on its hinges glides;  
Beneath the arch in solemn state  
A troop of warriors rides.

No drums were beat, nor fanfares peal,  
No cheery clarions rang;  
No sound was heard save clank of steel,  
The gate's deep sullen clang.



No other noise the echoes woke,  
    Was heard no parting word,  
Nought else the gloomy stillness broke,  
    As 'neath the arch they spurred.

The jewelled arms, the regal garb,  
    The monarch's shining mail,  
The trappings of his mettled barb,  
    That wave in each light gale :

The banners round that gaily flaunt  
    Seem mocking o'er his woe,  
The gems and gold a bitter taunt,  
    The bitter cup's o'erflow.

Behind him, sad, dejected, ride  
    His chiefs and captains brave,  
Once free Granada's joy and pride,  
    Now mourners round her grave.

And now they pass adown the street  
    And through the lonely ways ;  
No cheer the sad procession greets,  
    No eager Moslems gaze.

The rich bazaars, where costly ware  
Once caught the stranger's eye,  
Where silks embroidered, jewels rare,  
In splendour seemed to vie,

Are gone, and now no signs appear  
Of wealth, of peace, of life ;  
But all is sullen sadness, fear—  
All marks the deadly strife.

No sound of life the quiet breaks,  
No echoes strike the air,  
And nought the death-like torpor wakes  
As on the soldiers fare.

And now beneath the portal arch'd  
The tramp of horses rings,  
Where oft the Moorish armies march'd  
Beneath Granada's kings.

And now at last the portal's pass'd,  
The bridge unguarded lies ;  
The cavalcade now spurring fast  
Across the Vega hies.

The Vega—gone its glories were,  
    Its charms for ever fled ;  
Gaunt havoc reigned triumphant there,  
    Triumphant 'midst the dead.

No knoll is seen with verdure green,  
    No woods in foliage clad ;  
The sky serene o'erlooks a scene  
    All dark, and lone, and sad.

And there along each blacken'd field  
    The fest'ring corpses lay,  
As when the loud-voiced trumpet pealed  
    Above the fearful fray.

Those features hard and set and grim,  
    " Those lips whence flows no breath,"  
Those staring eyes, so glazed and dim,  
    All bear the stamp of death.

They lay in heaps of friends and foes  
    Along each grassy bank,  
" No kindly hand e'er sooth'd their woes "  
    As 'neath death's touch they sank.

There lay the haughty son of Spain,  
And there the Moslem proud,  
Reliques of many a gallant train ;  
No tomb was theirs, no shroud.

Each broken spear and scimitar  
Is black with rust and gore ;  
The owners' hand in tide of war  
Must carry them no more.

The foul and noisome birds that wheel  
Above each loathsome mass,  
Rise screaming from their horrid meal  
As on the horsemen pass.

Upon those orchards once so gay,  
Those meadows once so green,  
The radiant rays that lightly play  
Illume a changèd scene.

Where once majestic palm-trees grew,  
Where erst stood stately trees,  
And waving groves of em'rald hue  
Bent gently in the breeze ;

And where, in each secluded glade,  
    The silver streamlet gleam'd,  
And where, beneath the forest shade,  
    A thousand wild flowers teem'd—

Dire Mars had pass'd, the dogs of hell  
    Came close behind his car ;  
He cast o'er all his fatal spell,  
    “ Destruction—famine—war !”

The sword was bared, and lit the torch,  
    “ Sweet Peace her pinions spread ;”  
Like tempest was Bellona's march,  
    Each gurgling stream ran red.

The work which Nature's hand had traced  
    With all her loving care,  
By man's fell hate's destroy'd, effaced,  
    “ And ruin riots there.”

But see, what spear-tops glint and glare,  
    What weapons sparkle bright ?  
What pennons stream, what bucklers  
    glare ?—  
A rich and splendid sight.

And still they come, and still behind,  
Fresh squadrons press along ;  
Across the outstretched plain they wind—  
A vast and warlike throng.

In front, where loudest fanfares ring  
The glories of his reign,  
Appears the haughty Spanish king,  
Encased in mail of chain.

Beside him, with majestic mien,  
In regal splendour dight,  
Rode Isabel, Castille's fair queen,  
Upon her palfrey white.

The lords and knights and grandees proud,  
For pow'r and valour fam'd,  
That round the mighty monarch crowd,  
His boundless sway proclaim'd.

And floating o'er them high in air,  
The Christian flag's descried ;  
The cross where blazing jewels glare,  
The royal arms beside.

A flush comes o'er Boabdil's cheek,  
Then leaves it deadly pale ;  
His looks an inward struggle speak ;  
What pangs his soul assail ?

He'd lived to see his house and race  
Defeated, fall'n, o'erthrown ;  
Each castle, hold, and 'battled place,  
The Spaniards Empire own.

He'd seen that glorious heritage,  
Which Muza's\* sword had gained—  
Granada, where from age to age  
The Moorish kings had reigned—

For ever to his nation lost ;  
Though oft th' empurpled flood  
Proclaimed how dear the vict'ry cost,  
In seas of Spanish blood.

He thought how great the scorn and hate  
With which they'd read his name,  
How emulate to reprobate  
His weakness and his shame.

\* Muza-ben-Nosier, who, on the invitation of Count Julian, invaded Spain in the time of the Caliph Waleed Almansor, A.D. 711.

T'escape from thought he spurred his steed,  
And towards the phalanx press'd ;  
But checked at length his charger's speed.  
Where rose the royal crest.

The lords and nobles dropped away,  
And left them there alone ;  
A king whose word e'en kings obey—  
“ A king without a throne.”

The Spaniard's face with pleasure flush'd,  
Joy thrilled his ev'ry vein ;  
The long-resisting Moor lay crush'd  
Beneath the might of Spain.

For this his plotting brain has toil'd  
Through many a weary year,  
Though Fate his schemes full oft had foiled  
When triumph seemed most near.

But now the day had come at last,  
The desp'rate fight was o'er ;  
The Moslem's pow'r was of the past—  
Granada ruled no more.



The Moor before his conq'ror stands,  
     Nor utters sigh or groan ;  
 But sadly gazes round those lands—  
     No more, alas ! his own.

At last the lengthened pause he broke,  
     His voice emotion shook ;  
 In hollow, quiv'ring tones he spoke,  
     Despair was in his look.

“ The Moorish pow'r hath pass'd away,  
     And set 's Granada's sun ;  
 Her mighty kings and chiefs are clay,  
     Her kingdom is undone.

“ No more within our palace halls  
     The Moorish horn shall ring—  
 No more our banner from the walls  
     Its em'rald folds shall fling.

“ To me, the last of all my race—  
     ‘ Th' Unlucky ' rightly known—  
 To me 's reserved the last disgrace,  
     To yield my father's throne.

“But done be Allah’s sacred will :  
The Moslem’s fate was sealed ;  
What He decrees must I fulfil :  
Through thee His Word ’s revealed.

“Receive these keys, no longer mine ;  
Pass through th’ unguarded gates :  
Granada’s bulwarks proud are thine,  
For thee th’ Alhambra waits.”

He ceased : the stately monarch bent  
Before the fallen chief,  
Whose prowess, youth, misfortune lent  
Sad dignity to grief.

And down the queen’s pale cheek, un-  
stopp’d,

A pearly tear there rolled—  
A heavy tear, that, as it dropped,  
Sincere her pity told.

Boabdil sighed, a grateful glance  
Upon the queen bestowed,  
Then turned his rein, as in a trance,  
And towards the mountains rode.

At length the wearied coursers pause  
    Upon a lofty steep ;  
The scene the king's attention draws,  
    His eyes the valley sweep.

And from that high and lonely hill  
    He views his lost domain—  
Each rock and tree, each winding rill—  
    Each beauty adds fresh pain.

Beneath him, laved in streams of gold,  
    Bright Andalusia lay,  
Xenil like silver gaily rolled  
    Beneath the burning ray.

And, far beyond, Granada's tow'rs  
    Uprising are descried :  
Her gardens, her enchanting bow'rs—  
    The walls, the portals wide.

And now yon mail-clad columns mark !  
    With pennons gay and flags ;  
The very plain below is dark  
    As on each column drags.

And to his ear, by breezes borne,  
The martial music floats—  
The drum, the cymbals' clash, the horn,  
The bugle's piercing notes.

A tear was in his aching eye,  
A tear of bitter grief;  
And in a deep and choking sigh  
His bosom sought relief.

"Yes, weep," the proud Ayaxa cried;  
"Like woman, weep and moan;  
Thou rather shouldst in fight have died  
Than e'er this day have known.

"You rightly play the woman's part,  
'Tis all in truth you can;  
For, craven, thou'st a woman's heart,  
'In form alone thou'rt man.'

"Weak slave, thou art no son of mine,  
No son of Hassan's thou;  
Ah! woe for great Granada's line,  
When crown girt woman's brow."

His eye with rage and fury burn'd,  
He grasped his sabre's hilt ;  
" But no," he cried, as back he turned,  
" Sufficient blood is spilt."

" Thy angry words I must forgive,  
Thy taunt is but too just :  
Far better to have died than live,  
From throne and country thrust."

One longing wistful look he cast—  
A look of deepest pain ;  
Reluctant, then, he turned at last  
His pawing courser's rein.

The horses snort, the sabres flash,  
And dark the sky doth loom ;  
The squadrons meet with hideous crash,  
And deep's the cannon's boom.

The air is fraught with horrid sounds,  
The very breeze is hot,  
While 'midst each massy column bounds  
The show'r of whistling shot.

Where thickest on the reeking plain  
The trampled bodies were,  
Where thickest fell the deadly rain—  
Boabdil's corse lay there.

And still one lonely spot is shown  
To trav'lers speeding by ;  
The story's still in legend known,  
'Tis called "The Moor's last sigh."

*SUNRISE AT SEA.*

ABOVE the dark and heaving sea,  
Morn waves her roseate wing ;  
And fast the sullen night-mists flee  
Before day's gorgeous king.

Across the shad'wy waves he breaks  
With warm effulgent glance ;  
What late was gloom to gladness wakes,  
As from lethargic trance.

The fiery east is touched with gold,  
With flame the vault doth blaze,  
As back the sable pall is roll'd,  
And slow the mist doth raise.

And now he faster mounts on high,  
Till from his golden throne,

Sole monarch o'er the sea and sky,  
The sun-god rules alone.

The sea-birds wheel in flights around,  
Rejoicing at the day ;  
And o'er the vessel outward bound,  
The sparkling sunbeams play.

Upon the snowy sails they shine,  
Whilst from the keen-edged prow,  
In long far-stretching foamy line,  
The surges backward flow.

And cheer'ly o'er the deck outrings  
The sailor's merry song,  
As on the breeze, with snowy wings,  
The vessel speeds along.

All nature seems to wake from sleep  
To greet the smiling day ;  
And gay the wanton surges leap,  
'Midst showers of sparkling spray.



## THE DANES.

OUR ships are fleeting o'er the main,  
Beneath the waning moon ;  
But many a bloody crimson stain  
Shall mark their decks ere noon.  
Ah ! warriors, mirth doth reign to-night  
Within Valhalla's walls ;  
The golden mead is flowing bright  
In Odin's sacred halls.  
A "thousand manly voices sing,  
The festive cup goes round,"  
And loud the ghastly goblets ring,  
And loud the war-songs sound.  
The flaming fields, the towns afire,  
Shall be our guides to-day,

Yon cities, each a fun'ral pyre,  
Shall mark the Norseman's way.

To-day full many a soldier bold  
Must lie amid the dead ;  
His tomb the ocean deep and cold,  
With foeman's blood dyed red.

Now haste, Sir Viking, haste along !  
Behold the sun arise !  
Now raise to Woden's praise our song,  
As on the vessel flies.

Ah ! tremble, for the Norse are nigh,  
The raven spreads his wing ;  
And many a Christian foe shall die  
Where lands the bold sea-king.

THE END.



10, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND; June 15th, 1878.

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